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# The Image of the Beggar in Britain 1760-1820

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Presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, School of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Open University

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### Personal Statement

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or other qualification of the Open University or any other university or institution. It is entirely the work of the author.

### Abstract

The years between circa 1760 and 1820 saw the sudden appearance of a substantial body of beggar images in British art, yet by the end of the period such images had all but disappeared. This thesis aims to investigate this phenomenon, which has never before been systematically studied. It will be argued here that the image of the beggar assumed a symbolic significance as a result of the rapid socio-economic change that Britain underwent as it moved from a broadly paternalistic model of social relations to one increasingly based on *laissez-faire* principles. As the traditional signifier of poverty, the figure of the mendicant functioned at once to express and to contain elite concerns about these developments.

This thesis starts by examining the emergence of beggar imagery around the middle of the century before analysing its function in a range of genres. It argues that sentimental images in which the beggar is depicted as an object of sympathy and benevolence served to embody a new secular morality. At the same time, however, the beggar became an increasingly problematic presence in landscape imagery because mendicancy's inevitable association with poverty and suffering made it impossible to view the figure in a purely aesthetic light. Likewise, beggars feature only rarely in satirical images of the period because the moral and social issues raised by their plight meant that they could not readily be depicted as comic figures. Only as attitudes towards mendicity hardened in the years around 1800 did a more detached perspective become possible, such that the beggar came to be viewed in a comic and/or aesthetic spirit, either as a deviant or a rogue.

By exploring the tensions that surrounded the begging figure, this thesis helps to shed light on transformations in British culture and society in this period.

### Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

BM	British Museum
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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*London News*, 17 June 1848. Engraving, 31.3 x 31.9 cm. Private Collection.  
Look and Learn. Peter Jackson Collection. Bridgeman Images.

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Look and Learn. Illustrated Papers Collection. Bridgeman Images.

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Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 243.8 cm. © Royal Holloway, University of London.  
Bridgeman Images.

Figure 6.8 Thomas Faed, *The Poor, the Poor Man's Friend*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 ins. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

## Introduction

During the second half of the eighteenth and the opening decades of the nineteenth century, a considerable body of beggar imagery was produced in Britain: several hundred visual representations of mendicant figures, in a wide range of media, have survived from this period.<sup>1</sup> Their appearance is all the more remarkable insofar as they were without precedent in British art. First emerging in the 1760s, images of the beggar proliferated in the following years before largely disappearing around 1820 as suddenly as they had appeared. This period happens to coincide with the reign of George III, although this coincidence has no real significance for this project. The purpose of this thesis is to document, analyse and explain the phenomenon of beggar imagery, which has never before been systematically studied. The central claim is that the mendicant figure assumed a symbolic importance by functioning at once to express and to contain elite concerns about the decisive transformations taking place in British society in these years.

The beggar imagery appeared at a time of major political, economic and social change. Britain was engaged in conflicts overseas that helped to consolidate its expanding empire, while at home an economic revolution was taking place. Most significant for my topic is the growth in the numbers of the rural poor after 1760, not simply as a result of population increase but also, more fundamentally, of the increasing prevalence of market-oriented agrarian practices, in particular the appropriation of common land under an accelerating programme of enclosure. As the dispossessed moved into towns, the phenomenon of poverty became a matter of intense concern and continuing debate.<sup>2</sup> The later eighteenth century also witnessed major innovations in the institutions of art, notably the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768. The public exhibitions held by the Academy and other organisations brought visual art to a wider audience, as did the growth of the print industry. This thesis will explore the complex ways in which the beggar imagery produced in these years responded to the social, economic, political and cultural developments of the period.

Over the last half century or so, there have been major shifts in the way that the transformations that took place between 1760 and 1820 are understood by scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> Around three hundred and fifty images featuring the beggar are extant, with about seventy more listed in exhibition catalogues. If depictions of Belisarius and the few three-dimensional representations of beggars are included, this increases the total of extant beggar images to around three hundred and seventy, with about ninety more in exhibition catalogues. The categories of beggar imagery and the decades in which they appeared, are set out in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> King 2000: 105, 1.

During the 1960s, Marxist historians characterised the period as one in which capitalist practices intensified; they highlighted how the poor suffered as a moral economy was gradually replaced by an economy of *laissez-faire*. The 1980s saw a move away from this model to a new approach centred on the rise of a consumer society, such that the focus was not now on the poor but rather on the wealthier sections of society. More recently, there has been a shift away from both of these grand narratives to the close study of smaller units that has often been dubbed 'microhistory'.<sup>3</sup> By demonstrating how the image of the beggar can function as a lens through which to view the developments of the period, the present study offers insights into historical change that build on the broader perspectives of earlier approaches. In this way, the beggar imagery assumes an importance that goes beyond its art-historical significance.

As already indicated, the importance of the beggar imagery lies not in any direct relation to social reality but rather in its symbolic function. Here my theoretical model is based on the influential work of the literary scholars Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, which demonstrates the interdependence of the cultural categories of high and low. They famously argue that 'what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central', citing such marginal figures as gipsies and 'the lumpenproletariat', who play 'a symbolic role in bourgeois culture out of all proportion to their actual social importance'.<sup>4</sup> I extend their argument to the marginal figure of the beggar who could similarly be used to address wider issues, such that she/he represented both society's deepest fears and its highest aspirations. As well as signifying social disorder and a reprehensible idleness, the mendicant might also serve as a prompt to the sympathy and generosity that marked a benevolent nation. As I shall argue here, the beggar as she/he appeared in visual representations was first and foremost an imagined construction, one who mediated the spectre of growing pauperism that resulted from the social changes of the period, by translating it into a form both palatable and reassuring to an elite audience.

This study breaks new ground by addressing a topic that, as noted above, has not been the subject of scholarly investigation by art historians to date. By contrast, a considerable literature exists on the figure of the beggar as represented in the fiction and poetry of the period. Extensive research has also been carried out into the social reality of eighteenth-

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<sup>3</sup> Brewer 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Stallybrass and White 1986: 5, 20. The authors here reference the earlier work of Barbara Babcock. I avoid their use of the term 'bourgeois' in this thesis since it pertains to a developed capitalist society; 'middle class' is used throughout as more appropriate to the society of eighteenth-century Britain. The terminology of class is discussed in Section Two of this Introduction.



century mendicity, most of it focused on London.<sup>5</sup> Such studies as do exist of the visual representation of poverty in the British art of these years have been largely concerned with the rural labouring poor. By contrast, this thesis addresses the figure of the unproductive beggar in contexts both rural and urban; in so doing, it will shed new light on some relatively familiar images as well as discussing many that are almost entirely unknown today. In addition to filling a gap in the scholarly literature, however, this study addresses a subject that has an importance that extends beyond the purely academic. As will be discussed in the Conclusion, the last decade has seen mendicity again become a matter of public concern with growing numbers of beggars now a disturbing presence on the streets of Britain's towns and cities. The subject is thus – unfortunately – as relevant today as it was over two hundred years ago.

Throughout this thesis, gender-neutral language has been used. In the case of the beggar, however, as addressed below, it remains that in the visual material identified for this thesis, only about one third of the extant images depict a female beggar. That said, the female mendicant and related questions of gender and sexuality, do feature throughout this study. Furthermore, attention is paid to the way that perceived gender roles helped to shape the production and reception of beggar imagery more generally (for further on this point, see page 44). The higher proportion of male to female beggars did not reflect the actual distribution of beggars by gender on the streets of London (see the discussion on pages 41-42 below). This disproportion itself indicates that the symbolic function of the figure of the beggar took priority over any concern with documentary reality.

The three sections of this Introduction that follow open with a review of the art-historical literature relevant to the visual representation of the beggar. The second section addresses the work of social and cultural historians that has informed my understanding of the major developments that took place in Britain between circa 1760 and 1820. The final section makes specific reference to scholarship relating to London, thereby clarifying the historical category of the beggars found on the city's streets and identifying the London audiences for both paintings and prints of the mendicant. This Introduction concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis and the aims of the individual chapters.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Hitchcock 2004a, 2004b, 2005.

### Section One: Representing the beggar: the art-historical literature

In order to identify the issues that have yet to be addressed and thereby to demonstrate how this thesis breaks new ground, this section explores the existing art-historical literature relevant to the study of beggar imagery. Although the only extended investigation into the visual representation of the mendicant, by Tom Nichols, covers European imagery of the sixteenth century, his research is significant for present purposes because it documents the artistic precedents available to eighteenth-century British artists.<sup>6</sup> Also relevant are studies by John Barrell and Ann Bermingham that discuss representations of the rural poor in paintings produced during the Georgian period.<sup>7</sup> Neither they, nor other scholars, however, make more than passing reference to visual representations of the beggar from the same period.

For my purposes, the main importance of Nichols' work, *The Art of Poverty* (2007), lies in the distinction he draws between two contrasting European traditions of representing the beggar; namely, either as a legitimate object of Christian charity or as fraudulent and thus undeserving. Defined as the 'poor of Christ', or the sacred beggar, the first category consisted of the sick and elderly and appeared predominantly in the religious, public art of Italy. By contrast, the secular figure of the 'false beggar' feigned incapacity as a mask for idleness and, as such, served in satirical images to define by way of contrast their exemplary counterpart, the industrious member of the community. This figure was found mainly in the Netherlands and Germany, initially in the medium of print.<sup>8</sup> No comparable tradition of beggar images, however, existed in Britain at the time; Nichols identifies only one example from this country, a woodcut of a false beggar that illustrates a text of 1566.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the eighteenth century, as will be shown, British artists would draw on the European tradition of the sacred beggar to create a different, more secular figure; predominantly male, this mendicant is usually, although not always, shown to be incapable of work and, as such, deserving. The earlier tradition of the false beggar, however, was not developed; this discrepancy will be a key issue for investigation.

Although Nichols' study covers an earlier period than the one explored in this project, it nevertheless offers important insights for later beggar imagery. His broad definition of his material as 'any visual image that includes a depiction of the recognisable social type of the

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<sup>6</sup> Nichols 2007a.

<sup>7</sup> Barrell 1980; Bermingham 1986, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Nichols 2007a: 120, 6, 80.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 198-201.

beggar' is one that I have adopted in selecting images for discussion.<sup>10</sup> Of particular relevance has been Nichols' argument that, in a century characterised by change, the beggar image was used to explore 'many of the central narratives of European social and religious life'.<sup>11</sup> A key issue for this study will be whether or not representations of the mendicant could perform the same function two hundred years later in a period that similarly experienced significant change; where the sixteenth century saw the growth of a market-based economy and religious reform, the eighteenth century likewise witnessed the consolidation of capitalism and the rise of the evangelical movement. Of equal importance for my purpose has been Nichols' argument, echoing Stallybrass and White, that the socially marginal became 'symbolically central within European cultural life'; the extent to which this continued to be true for later representations of the marginal figure of the beggar will be investigated.<sup>12</sup> By comparison with Nichols' work, however, the present study covers a narrower geographical area and a more limited time span; this tighter focus makes it possible to address the context of the individual images in greater detail.

One further issue raised by Nichols that has proved central to this thesis is the fundamentally performative character of the beggar's identity, both in life and in art. Nichols argues that, in life, beggars must perform their poverty in order to attract attention and invite sympathy, so securing alms. To this end, the mendicant employs visual indicators such as a ragged appearance and a begging bowl which have thus become 'conventionalised cultural signs'. As Nichols further notes, the beggar's act has changed little over the centuries.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, their performance assumes an audience; begging on the street is, Nichols contends, 'a form of spectacularised activity that relies on the active performance of poverty to produce a dramatic moral effect on the viewer'. He argues that, whereas in life, the viewer is the passer-by, the work of art constructs its own viewer.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between this constructed or imagined spectator and the visual representation of the beggar will be a key issue to be addressed. Furthermore, Nichols argues that the image of the false beggar functioned to define the viewer as both their moral and social superior; the role of the later images of the mendicant in the formation of elite identities will thus also be investigated.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid: 239.

<sup>12</sup> Nichols 2007a: 240.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 86, 230.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid: 230.

Although there is no literature relating to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century beggar imagery comparable to Nichols' work, I have been able to draw on a substantial body of art-historical scholarship that addresses the wider category of the rural poor in this period. An early work in this field is *The Dark Side of the Landscape* (1980), by the literary scholar John Barrell, the influence of which has been such that it has informed the work of all subsequent scholars working in this area. Barrell's study re-examines paintings of rural scenes by Thomas Gainsborough, George Morland and John Constable to reveal the constraints under which these artists were operating. Barrell argues that the years between 1730 and 1840 were marked by social tensions between rich and poor as Britain moved from a 'paternalist' to a 'capitalist economy'.<sup>16</sup> As he acknowledges, his argument is informed by the social historian E. P. Thompson, whose work will be discussed in the following section. In its concern with the relationship of art to ideology, Barrell's approach in this study can be broadly aligned with the Marxist social history of art of the 1970s.

Of central importance for this thesis is Barrell's claim that the social tensions he identifies between rich and poor had to be concealed in paintings of the poor in order to meet the ideological demands of an 'aristocratic and [...] bourgeois public'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, for example, he argues that Gainsborough's early landscapes present scenes of social harmony that confirmed 'the boasted equality of Merry England'.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in a developing capitalist economy, it became important to represent the rural poor as industrious, rather than as the idle shepherds of the pastoral landscape.<sup>19</sup> However, the viewing public did not want to confront the harsh reality of labour, or the poverty and suffering of the labouring man; the challenge for artists was therefore to convey the industriousness of the rural poor in a form that would be palatable to viewers. Barrell's argument here for a direct relationship between artworks and the ideological demands of their audience can be extended in the context of images of the beggar, which do not form part of his investigation. As one who was by definition idle (at least if able-bodied) and who therefore defied society's moral imperative to work, the mendicant was an even more problematic subject for the viewer than the labouring poor. Yet the majority of the images that form the subject of the present thesis represent the mendicant in a positive light; how this was achieved will be a key issue for this study.

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<sup>16</sup> Barrell 1980: 3.

<sup>17</sup> Barrell 1980: 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid: 52.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid: 13.

A limitation to Barrell's study is that, as a literary scholar, he relies heavily on contemporary poetry as the basis for his interpretations without engaging with other types of sources. Although he makes the case for the moral and social constraints that governed the representation of the poor, he gives less attention to the aesthetic dimension of these restrictions. This aspect has been addressed, however, in an essay by the art historian Sam Smiles that supplements Barrell's work. Writing about the depiction of the rural poor between circa 1790 and 1830, Smiles draws on material such as critical reviews in order to identify 'the strict limits' prescribed by contemporary aesthetics in representations of low life, if the demands of the polite viewer were to be met.<sup>20</sup> As an example of the way in which low life could be translated 'into a suitable aesthetic language', Smiles notes the 'smooth lineaments and regular features' of the workers in Richard Westall's *A Storm in Harvest* (1795) or Joshua Cristall's *Hop-Picking* (1807), arguing that these not only afforded the spectator pleasure but also served to keep the labourers at a distance, as objects of the gaze.<sup>21</sup> The work of Barrell and Smiles together provides a basis for investigating the several constraints faced by artists who would represent the begging figure.

As well as being informed by Barrell's study, my understanding of the ideological function of artworks produced in the period from the mid-eighteenth to the early decades of the nineteenth century has been further enriched by Ann Bermingham's *Landscape and Ideology* (1986). In contrast to Barrell, who addresses both landscape and subject painting, Bermingham explores the relationship between artworks and the socio-economic change taking place in the English countryside, primarily with reference to rustic landscape painting, which emerged as a major genre in British art towards the end of the eighteenth century. Of central importance for the present study is her demonstration of the ways in which an elite ideology was inscribed in the paintings under discussion. Like Barrell, she adopts a broadly Marxist approach, one that views art history as 'an ideological process of interpretation'.<sup>22</sup> However, whereas Barrell sees artists as mere instruments of class ideology in offering a straightforward expression of what they or their clientele 'wish to believe was true about the rural poor' and their relations with the rest of society, Bermingham takes a more nuanced approach, finding ideology to be 'indirectly

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<sup>20</sup> Smiles 1997: 80.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid: 87-88. Christiana Payne has similarly demonstrated how early nineteenth-century agricultural landscapes kept within the bounds of both aesthetic and social decorum. (Payne 1997: 72-75)

<sup>22</sup> Bermingham 1986: 2.

inscribed'.<sup>23</sup> Following the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's model of the workings of ideology, she argues that these paintings present 'an illusionary account of the real landscape while alluding to the actual conditions existing in it'. In so doing, they reveal 'the relationship of a particular class to the means of production'.<sup>24</sup> Such an approach seems more appropriate to a study of beggar images which, as already indicated, do not give expression to capitalist ideology in any straightforward way.

Bermingham's nuanced approach to the ideological dimension of art is exemplified by her discussion of the picturesque. As a landscape aesthetic that focused on wild scenery, the picturesque would seem to be at odds with the landscape of improvement, in which productivity is maximised through such practices as enclosure.<sup>25</sup> However, Bermingham argues that, rather than embodying 'an old order of rural paternalism', opposed to the values of the new capitalist order, the picturesque aestheticised rural poverty, thereby distancing itself from the scenes of misery and neglect it portrayed.<sup>26</sup> In the theory of the picturesque, 'wandering tribes of gypsies and beggars' became mere picturesque objects, a form of aesthetic detachment that amounts to an expression of 'social disdain'.<sup>27</sup> This lack of concern for human values, she contends, suggests that 'at a deeper level the picturesque endorsed the results of agricultural industrialization' and in this way inscribed the values of the wealthy landowning class who, as already indicated, profited from such practices at the expense of the poor.<sup>28</sup> Bermingham argues here for a strategy of representation that responds to socio-economic change but does not directly challenge it; her strategy has relevance for paintings of the beggar insofar as, by aestheticising the poverty of the mendicant, such images acknowledge social change but evade its moral consequences. In making this argument, I extend Bermingham's analysis in a new context. More specifically, I investigate further the claim, to which she makes reference, for the beggar's place in the picturesque landscape.

Some twenty years after *Landscape and Ideology*, Bermingham edited a collection of essays on Gainsborough's cottage door scenes, *Sensation and Sensibility* (2005), in which her focus was now not on the ideological function of the artist's paintings but rather on their power 'to touch and to move' the viewer.<sup>29</sup> The 'sensibility' referred to in the title has

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<sup>23</sup> Barrell 1980: 18; Bermingham 1986: 2.

<sup>24</sup> Bermingham 1986: 3.

<sup>25</sup> Both improvement and enclosure will be addressed more fully in the following section.

<sup>26</sup> Bermingham 1986: 70.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid: 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid: 75.

<sup>29</sup> Bermingham 2005: 33.

been the subject of much recent scholarship and will be discussed further in the following section; understood at the time as the capacity for fellow feeling, it was proposed as the basis for social relations. In her introduction, Bermingham contends that, as images 'constructed to move the viewer', the cottage door scenes give visual expression to sensibility.<sup>30</sup> She argues that not only were these scenes among some of the earliest works of British landscape painting to acknowledge the significance of the rural poor as subjects, but they were also so constructed as to prompt feelings of sympathy and benevolence towards these figures.<sup>31</sup> Bermingham's insights here can be contrasted with the more politicised reading of the same scenes offered by Barrell in his 1980 study: for him, the figure of the 'deformed and struggling labourer' pointed to 'a crisis of poverty in the villages'.<sup>32</sup> However, Bermingham's approach to these paintings as prompts to sensibility has proved more useful for the present study in providing an account of how scenes featuring the rural poor could make their appeal to the sympathy of the elite viewer.

Nevertheless, Barrell's more recent discussion of the political dimension of the cottage door scenes is of significance for this project. In his contribution to *Sensation and Sensibility*, he builds on points that he first made in his 1980 work to give a more complex account of these scenes. He argues that such depictions of the rural poor embody an elite ideology that prescribed 'how the poor should behave' by representing them as neat and industrious.<sup>33</sup> Images of a contented poor, he contends, became all the more important in the 1790s, following the French Revolution, when they functioned as a contrast to the misery of the poor of France. However, Barrell further argues, a significant tension existed between this prescriptive ideology and the valorisation of dirt and raggedness in the picturesque aesthetic; such a tension would be even more pronounced in the figure of the beggar whose rags could be aesthetically pleasing but could also signify a reprehensible idleness.<sup>34</sup> I build on the essays of both Barrell and Bermingham in this volume by investigating how far their accounts of the ways in which images of the rural poor could make their appeal to the elite viewer are also true for representations of the beggar and could, indeed, explain their proliferation.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 12, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid: 1, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Barrell 1980: 71-72.

<sup>33</sup> Barrell 2005: 54.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid: 57. In this context, Christiana Payne had earlier made reference to the beggar as a pictorial type whose ragged attire could be read either as picturesque or, from a moral standpoint, as signifying fecklessness and idleness. (Payne 2002)

None of the studies of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century rural scenes discussed so far has addressed the representation of the mendicant. Indeed, the only brief reference to the figure in the art-historical literature concerning this period comes in an exhibition catalogue, *Angels and Urchins* (1998), whose subject is the fancy picture that had been established as a distinct genre in Britain by 1760. The catalogue's author, Martin Postle, however, adopts a rather conventional approach, addressing the pictorial traditions of the genre with very little reference to the social and cultural context in which these paintings were produced and viewed. He devotes only four pages to 'The Deserving Poor', among whom he includes the beggar. The significant omission in this brief discussion is any attempt to relate these images of deserving beggars to the discourse of sensibility, which would have enabled Postle to consider both their reception by an elite audience and the ideological needs that they addressed.<sup>35</sup> The fancy picture took as its subject social types that were 'other' to the elite viewer; often female, they included the poor who were sometimes depicted begging in a direct appeal to the viewer's sympathy. In order to elicit compassion, these begging figures had to be shown as both needy and deserving, thereby validating the viewer's response; however, the more disturbing aspects of the destitute had to be contained to avoid troubling the audience. A key concern in the present project will therefore be to establish how the figure was constructed in the fancy picture so as to both prompt the viewer's compassion and meet their ideological demands.

My own approach has been further informed by scholarship that explores eighteenth-century British art in relation to its audience and reception. This concern first emerged in British art studies in the work of scholars following a Marxist approach, such as Andrew Hemingway. In his study of British landscape imagery in the early 1800s, Hemingway emphasises the importance of London, arguing that these landscape paintings were an 'urban phenomenon', produced for a London audience that comprised the 'aristocracy, gentry and different ranks of the bourgeoisie'; in short, the elite.<sup>36</sup> It is this audience, he contends, that we must consider in order to understand the meanings of the images. Other scholars, most notably David Solkin and his fellow contributors to *Art on the Line* (2001), have added to our knowledge of the exhibition audience and its 'viewing practices'; Solkin notes, for example, that the elite character of this audience was determined by the shilling

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<sup>35</sup> There is a similar limitation to an earlier article by Patricia Crown in which she argues for a growing recognition of the pathos implicit in images of child beggars but does not relate this to the discourse of sensibility. (Crown 1984)

<sup>36</sup> Hemingway 1992: 8, 4. A later essay by Hemingway specifically addresses the 'new type of bourgeois public for art', for whom art was primarily 'a source of simple pleasures'. (Hemingway 1995: 105)



admission fee charged by the Royal Academy, in order, so the inaugural exhibition catalogue states, to prevent 'the Room from being filled by improper Persons'.<sup>37</sup> Establishing the social composition of the audience for the paintings of the beggar that were exhibited in London helps in understanding how these images functioned for their viewers.

A more recent work by Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary* (2008), builds on his work on the institutions of art by exploring the significance of the pictorial traditions of what had come by the early 1800s to be known as 'genre painting'. Although not of direct relevance to the subject of beggar imagery, his study of the 'paintings of everyday life' (as such paintings are also known) demonstrates how the representation of low life was framed by this tradition. Thus, he highlights David Wilkie's debt in *Village Politicians* (1806) to seventeenth-century Netherlandish art, as well as the artist's close attention 'to the varied particulars of his highly localised scene', both of which are said to give visual expression to a conservative ideology that valued 'the local and the vernacular'.<sup>38</sup> Here Solkin, in contrast to Barrell, demonstrates the specifically artistic means through which ideologies could be mediated. In the present study, however, rather than following Solkin in emphasising the political functions of mediation, I use the concept more loosely to refer to the ways in which contemporary ideas and values more broadly, not just the political, are constructed and conveyed through artworks and the practices and institutions of the art world. Nevertheless, Solkin's demonstration of the ways in which paintings can be shaped by artistic traditions can throw light on the references made to pictorial tradition in the beggar imagery.

The scholarship here reviewed has provided a sound basis on which this thesis can build. Nichols' work has established the main visual traditions of beggar imagery and identified possible functions such imagery could perform. The work of scholars such as Barrell and Bermingham has addressed the ways in which representations of the rural poor could give visual expression to the ideologies of an elite audience. They, together with Solkin, have demonstrated the importance of interpreting artworks in relation to the socio-economic, political, cultural and institutional contexts of production and reception. More specifically, the brief study by Postle has served to highlight the need for further investigation into paintings of the beggar. Drawing on the models for thinking about the

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<sup>37</sup> Solkin 2001: 2, 40. Solkin's earlier *Painting for Money*, published around the same time as Hemingway's study, also addressed the subject of the viewing public. (Solkin: 1993)

<sup>38</sup> Solkin 2008: 14.

beggar imagery that the existing literature has provided, the present thesis will investigate the questions that this literature has raised, most notably about how artists sought to reconcile the tensions inherent in the representation of the mendicant figure, and about the functions the beggar imagery could perform for an elite audience in mediating historical change.

## Section Two: The beggar imagery in context

A central argument put forward in this thesis is that the beggar images produced between circa 1760 and 1820 can be read as responses to the significant changes that characterised these years. In order to substantiate this claim, it is necessary to identify the socio-economic, cultural and political developments that form the broad context in which the images are to be understood. As noted earlier, shifts in the historiography of the period have produced different accounts of British society, two of which have been of particular importance for this study. The Marxist model developed by Thompson in the 1960s has obvious relevance for the subject of the beggar in its focus on the consequences for the poor of a developing capitalism, and the class conflict between those he terms plebs and patricians.<sup>39</sup> Although the consumer society model, elaborated in the 1980s by historians such as Paul Langford, shifted the emphasis to an emerging middle class, this model nevertheless also has relevance for this thesis, which contends that the changing relationship of the middle classes to the poor, throughout the years 1760 to 1820, found visual expression in images of the beggar. Moreover, both of these grand narratives have informed recent scholarship on eighteenth-century philanthropy, a topic important for this study since it represented the major way, besides art and literature, in which the elite responded to the problem of mendicity. As well as discussing philanthropy and the two contrasting models of eighteenth-century British society, this section will also address both sentimentalism, as the most significant cultural development of the period, and the key political event of these years which was the 1789 French Revolution.

For the purposes of this thesis, Thompson's Marxist model is important in identifying the impact on the poor of the significant socio-economic changes of these years which he relates to the emergence of a 'new political economy' in which moral imperatives had no place.<sup>40</sup> A market model of *laissez-faire* was gradually eroding both the social obligations

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<sup>39</sup> Some of Thompson's earlier work is brought together in his *Customs in Common*. (Thompson 1993)

<sup>40</sup> Thompson 1993: 202.

of the rich to the poor, as embodied in paternalism, and the customary rights, such as wood-gathering, which formed a vital part of the subsistence economy of the poor.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, these changes are to be understood in terms of the class struggle between patricians and plebeians that characterised social relations in the period.<sup>42</sup> Writing on popular custom, Thompson states his belief that 'we can read much eighteenth-century social history as a succession of confrontations between an innovative market economy and the customary moral economy of the plebs'.<sup>43</sup> More recently, historians have argued for a more nuanced understanding of Thompson's 'moral economy'; Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, for example, contend that it was 'as much about the negotiation of power as about actual rights'.<sup>44</sup> Thompson's model has been further criticised by historians such as Langford for neglecting the importance of the middle class in eighteenth-century England.<sup>45</sup> However, the 'ideological break with paternalism' that Thompson identifies is more widely acknowledged, even if the precise time of its occurrence is disputed.<sup>46</sup> It is this break with paternalism, and the social tensions that it engendered, that Barrell acknowledges as the context for his 1980 work.<sup>47</sup> Although the criticism of Thompson's neglect of an emerging middle class is undoubtedly well-founded, his argument for the severe damage to the social fabric that resulted from the shift to a market economy remains convincing.

In recent years, moreover, Thompson's model has been expanded and substantiated by other scholars. Of particular relevance for this thesis is the literature on what was known at the time as 'improvement', a topic touched on briefly in the previous section. In an agrarian context, improvement aimed to enhance the productivity of the land by the application of scientific farming methods and such practices as enclosure. However, as the archaeologist Sarah Tarlow has argued, 'rather than purely a rational response to economic circumstances', improvement was an ideological phenomenon. Seen as 'a moral and ethical obligation', it justified practices that brought wealth to landowners but resulted in increased hardship for the poor.<sup>48</sup> Drawing on research by Keith Snell, which shows how the poor

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<sup>41</sup> Wood-gathering was criminalised in 1766: 6 Geo. III., c. 48.

<sup>42</sup> The traditional Marxist model features a three-class society of landowners, bourgeoisie and proletariat engaged in class struggle; historians have argued, however, that such a model does not fit Georgian society. (Porter 1991: 53)

<sup>43</sup> Thompson 1993: 12.

<sup>44</sup> Randall and Charlesworth 2000: 20.

<sup>45</sup> Langford 1989: 61.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson dates it to the 1790s. (Thompson 1993: 86) Langford, however, identifies 'a crisis of paternalism' earlier, in the 1760s and 1770s. (Langford 1989: 441)

<sup>47</sup> Barrell 1980: 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Tarlow 2007: 190, 19.

were cut off from the practice of common rights, not only gleaning and wood-gathering, but also the right to keep animals on common land, Stephen King concludes that enclosure 'stripped away a significant plank of the welfare patchwork deployed by many ordinary people'.<sup>49</sup> If one consequence was an increased demand for poor relief, another was undoubtedly an increase in the begging population. The literary scholars Jordana Rosenberg and Chi-ming Yang have situated the practice of enclosure in a global context, seeing it as but one example of the dispossession necessary for the accumulation of capital. The same process, they argue, is evident not only in the English countryside in the eighteenth century, but also in the practice of slavery in the Caribbean.<sup>50</sup> As an emblematic figure of dispossession, the beggar can function as a vehicle for exploring the processes through which capitalist production was extended across Britain and its Empire.

For the purposes of investigating beggar imagery, improvement must be understood to be as much an urban as a rural phenomenon. Both Tarlow and the geographer Miles Ogborn have demonstrated how (in the words of the latter) it gave rise to 'newly paved, lit and cleansed London streets'.<sup>51</sup> However, the literature also suggests social tensions; Ogborn notes how urban improvement led to conflicts between public and private interests.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, as the architectural historian Elizabeth McKellar has shown, the rapidly expanding suburbs of London were 'a zone of marginality and displacement', associated with figures such as the prostitute and the highwayman, which produced a collision of 'the genteel and the criminal, the leisured and the indigent'.<sup>53</sup> There exists, however, little literature that deals specifically with the consequences of urban improvement for the poor, a gap that this thesis will go some way to fill. The only publication to date that directly addresses this subject is an article by the geographer Henry Lawrence that investigates the measures taken to keep beggars and other disorderly persons out of London's residential squares, which thus constituted an urban counterpart to enclosure. Lawrence argues that the London squares thereby became 'the arena for the working out of major class tensions in the struggle over public and private rights in the urban landscape'.<sup>54</sup> The key question for the present study is whether any trace of the social tensions identified by Lawrence can be discerned in representations of the beggar in the urban landscape.

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<sup>49</sup> King 2000: 37.

<sup>50</sup> Rosenberg and Yang 2014: 138.

<sup>51</sup> Ogborn 1998: 114.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid: 115.

<sup>53</sup> McKellar 2013: 22-26.

<sup>54</sup> Lawrence 1993: 114.

Whereas Thompson's Marxist model had presented Britain in the eighteenth century as riven by class conflict, the alternative historiographical model that emerged in the 1980s represented society as (in the words of Paul Monod) 'remarkably harmonious and stable'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it has been claimed that, after Thompson, 'social division and class conflict were gradually written out of the script'.<sup>56</sup> Historians such as Langford argued that the wealth generated by commerce created a consumer society of 'a polite and commercial people' in which an emerging middle class played a significant role; by the middle of George III's reign, Langford contends, 'a powerful and extensive middle class' had come into existence.<sup>57</sup> Despite rejecting Thompson's vision of an increasing gulf between patricians and plebs, Langford likewise sees the rise of capitalism as the primary cause of the social changes that he traces. Rather than simply replacing a binary model of society with a tripartite one, however, Langford and his fellow historians argue for a society characterised by a blurring of class boundaries; thus, for example, following this model, the art historian Diana Donald sees an 'enlargement of the elite brought about by the growing wealth and social aspirations of the middling ranks'.<sup>58</sup> The importance of this account of social change for the present study is that, as the historian John Brewer has argued, increasing wealth meant that 'culture was well within the purchasing power of the 'middling sort', who were sufficiently affluent both to visit the London art exhibitions, as Solkin has shown, and to purchase prints.<sup>59</sup> In this way, they played a role in shaping contemporary culture. This thesis will argue that a key function of the beggar images was to meet the needs of this newly affluent audience.

In so doing, however, it is also important to acknowledge that the growing prominence of the middle class during this period is not accepted by all historians. Jonathan Clark has denied that class categories existed at all before the nineteenth century; arguing that England remained an aristocratic society, he is in this respect close to Thompson.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, as Penelope Corfield has demonstrated, the term 'class' was certainly in use by the 1750s.<sup>61</sup> According to the cultural historian Dror Wahrman, however, it was not until the Reform Act of 1832 that a middle-class consciousness can really be said to have emerged, even if, as Wahrman acknowledges, a 'middle class idiom' had already appeared

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<sup>55</sup> Monod 2008: 94.

<sup>56</sup> Hitchcock 2004b: 296.

<sup>57</sup> Langford 1989: 1, 68.

<sup>58</sup> Donald 1996: 93.

<sup>59</sup> Brewer 1997: 93.

<sup>60</sup> Clark 2000: 25.

<sup>61</sup> Corfield 1987: 48.

in the political discourse of the 1790s.<sup>62</sup> Although accepting that class consciousness was gradually forged over the course of the period explored in this thesis, I have used the terminology of class here. Following the historian Jonathan Barry, I identify the middle class in general terms as those groups who occupied the social space between the landed elite and the poor.<sup>63</sup> This thesis will investigate not only how the figure of the beggar could be represented so as to appeal to a middle-class audience, but also the ways in which it could help them to articulate a new, moralised, social identity.

Of equal importance for this project has been the moral aspect of the relations between the middle classes and the poor. Although he does not foreground class conflict in his account, Langford does acknowledge a growing problem of inequality, arguing that 'population growth prevented the manual labour force from extracting its proper share of the new wealth and enhanced this sense of a world in which the rich were getting richer and the poor poorer'.<sup>64</sup> The contemporary perception of growing inequality has been underlined by other scholars, such as King, who argues that 'by the late eighteenth century the increasingly visible gulf between rich and poor had begun to force itself upon the conceptions of a middle-class public'. One way that the latter responded to this state of affairs, however, was to justify this disparity of wealth by ascribing it to 'the failings of the poor themselves'. King reads this response as 'proof enough that society was becoming more polarised in many ways'.<sup>65</sup> A weakening sense of community is also evident in the debates over the Poor Laws that took place at the end of the century and beyond. War and poor harvests in the 1790s had seen the cost of poor relief rise for parish ratepayers, prompting a debate over society's statutory obligations to the poor. Those opposing the Poor Laws, such as the economist Thomas Malthus, argued that they encouraged idleness and fostered both dependence and a 'want of frugality'.<sup>66</sup> One of the issues to be addressed in this thesis is whether or not the social tensions that have been identified find expression in the beggar imagery.

Nevertheless, there was widespread acceptance that the better-off did have some responsibility for the welfare of the poor, as is evident in the great wave of philanthropic

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<sup>62</sup> Wahrman 1995: 46.

<sup>63</sup> Barry and Brooks 1994: 2.

<sup>64</sup> Langford 1989: 68. Boyd Hilton identifies the years 1783 to 1841 as marked by a huge population increase. (Hilton 2006: 5)

<sup>65</sup> King 2000: 105. The historian Jeannette Neeson considers the problem of inequality to have been exacerbated by enclosure, arguing that all eighteenth-century writers on the subject agreed on 'a relationship between the survival and decline of common right and the nature of social relations in England'. (Neeson 1993: 9)

<sup>66</sup> Malthus 2018: 323-324. For Poor Law Reform, see Cowherd (1977) and Innes (2005).

activity in these years. In her study of London charitable institutions, Donna Andrew identifies the mid-century as the crucial period when new forms of charitable endeavour got underway; she further notes that the final decades of the century saw the founding of many voluntary societies focused on moral and spiritual reform, in line with the priorities of the evangelical movement that came to the fore in this period.<sup>67</sup> The crucial point here is that the new model of philanthropy reconceived the response to poverty in terms appropriate to the developing capitalist order; a paternalistic system of almsgiving, now perceived merely to encourage dependence, was gradually replaced by practices that promoted self-help and social rehabilitation, not least thanks to the efforts of evangelicals whose charitable endeavours were closely aligned to the economics of *laissez-faire*.<sup>68</sup> This shift in attitudes to charitable practice, together with parallel developments in the elite response to mendicity, will be investigated for their consequences for the beggar.

Philanthropy represented a distinctively middle-class response to the problems of poverty and social division. Although noblemen acted as the figureheads of the philanthropic associations, the work was carried out by members of these associations who came from the middle classes and who included women. Anne Borsay's research into the Bath General Infirmary in the early Georgian period has demonstrated how such charitable activity could help to forge a middle-class identity. She argues that a middle-class social consciousness was evident as early as the 1760s, nurtured by men who shared 'a common prosperity' and 'patterns of consumption and behaviour', frequently coming together in their role as governors of the Infirmary. Furthermore, through their contact with their social superiors in their management role, these men acquired status and the confidence that went with it. Borsay argues that the voluntary organisations provided the middle class with opportunities for political influence well before 1832, here taking issue with Wahrman.<sup>69</sup> Beth Fowkes Tobin has argued that charitable work had a further role in establishing a middle-class identity insofar as members of this class claimed that their talents and supervisory abilities gave them, rather than the irresponsible landed classes, the right to superintend the poor.<sup>70</sup> Although the scholarship on philanthropy does not deal

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew 1989.

<sup>68</sup> For the espousal of *laissez-faire* policies by moderate evangelicals, see Boyd Hilton. (Hilton 1988: 94) In the context of the development of philanthropy in tandem with capitalism in the eighteenth century, Robert Jütte, writing about poverty in early modern Europe, has argued that 'the basic tenets and programmes of any poor relief system reflect the values of the society in which the system functions'. (Jütte 1994: 197)

<sup>69</sup> Borsay 1999: 285.

<sup>70</sup> Tobin 1993: 2. A more recent work by Andrew addresses the subject of middle-class attacks on the perceived vices of the aristocracy. (Andrew 2013)

specifically with mendicity, it does provide evidence of elite attitudes to the poor more generally.

The middle-class response to poverty and social inequality not only took the practical form of philanthropic activity but found cultural expression as well. Although charitable endeavour might assuage middle-class unease, it did not wholly suppress it. From as early as 1760, so the literary scholar Marilyn Butler has argued, evidence can be found in the arts of 'a deep and widespread change of feeling, a pervasive mood of rejection of current society' which she suggests was a response to a period of rapid change.<sup>71</sup> Scholars have argued that, by the end of the century, this sense of disquiet had helped to forge the movement known as Romanticism. The sociologist Michael Löwy, and the literary scholar Robert Sayre, contend that Romanticism was not just a literary phenomenon but rather a cultural protest against capitalism and the 'ideologies of progress'. A rejection of contemporary society, they argue, created a nostalgia for past values perceived to have been lost with the weakening of social bonds. Furthermore, at the level of the imaginary, they see Romanticism as aestheticising the present in an attempt to recreate an 'ideal past state'.<sup>72</sup> This nostalgic reference to an idealised, premodern past can be read as a response that served to contain the anxieties to which capitalism had given rise, without actually opposing it. This argument would suggest that aestheticising the figure of the beggar can also be understood as an attempt to accommodate the anxieties attendant upon capitalist practices. An investigation of the beggar imagery can therefore help to understand the profound cultural shifts that these scholars have identified.

Of more direct relevance for representations of the beggar is the cultural phenomenon of sentimentalism, touched on in the previous section, that gained importance in the second half of the eighteenth century. In sentimentalism, feelings, rather than religious authority, were proposed as the basis of the moral life.<sup>73</sup> In common with the later Romantic movement, to which it can be seen to have contributed, the sentimental project gave expression to concerns about the nature of social relations in a commercial world.<sup>74</sup> It both celebrated traditional paternalist values and manifested a concern for the plight of the poor. Sentimentalism found expression predominantly in works of fiction, such as Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768); of significance for present purposes is the

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<sup>71</sup> Butler 1981: 22, 27-28.

<sup>72</sup> Sayre and Löwy 2005: 433, 447, 435; Löwy and Sayre 2001: 23.

<sup>73</sup> Bell 2000: 2. The process of secularisation that encouraged new ways of thinking about ethical conduct is discussed by Thomas Dixon in *From Passions to Emotions*. (Dixon 2003)

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Lamb finds the growth of capitalism leading to the weakening of social bonds from the late seventeenth century. (Lamb 2009: 43)



frequency with which encounters with a beggar featured in these works. The function of the mendicant in these sentimental scenes was to appeal to the viewer's sensibility, in order to prompt both sympathy and benevolence. Such displays of fellow-feeling dramatised the ideal social relations between the classes that were sentimentalism's aim; at the same time, the giving of alms was shown to be an appropriate response to poverty. However, the efficacy of the sentimental project remained limited; as Michael Bell has argued, 'the role of sentiment in personal relations [...] cannot be simply transposed onto the social scale'.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, as an attempt to engage with the problem of poverty it evaded the underlying causes of socio-economic change. Nevertheless, sentimentalism is important for this study; there are a significant number of visual representations of the beggar in the sentimental mode which will be investigated for the ways in which they could serve to address contemporary anxieties about poverty and social relations.

Tensions between the classes, however, were exacerbated by the French Revolution of 1789, as historians agree. Boyd Hilton, for example, has characterised the years after the mid-1780s as a time of 'widespread feelings of insecurity' as 'established codes were contested'; there was 'a constant sensation of fear – fear of revolution, of the masses, of crime [...] of disorder and instability'.<sup>76</sup> The Revolution intensified these fears with one result being a hardening of attitudes towards the beggar; the historian Nicholas Rogers notes a 'crack-down against vagrancy' after 1790.<sup>77</sup> Disquiet about begging was part of the wider concerns about poverty that were evident in the debates over the Poor Laws in the 1790s, mentioned earlier. It was in these years that more systematic enquiries were instigated into the problem of mendicity in the capital, prompted by the belief that greater knowledge would be a means to control. At the same time, sensibility, already facing criticism for its tendency to excess and self-indulgence, became politicised; as Bermingham argues, it was condemned by politicians as too close to the French revolutionary ideas of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity'.<sup>78</sup> How far this shift in attitudes towards the mendicant would find visual representation in later beggar imagery will be investigated.

For the purposes of this thesis, the key changes that took place in the years between circa 1760 and 1820 have been identified as the increasing polarisation of society that

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<sup>75</sup> Bell 2000: 50.

<sup>76</sup> Hilton 2006: 36, 31.

<sup>77</sup> Rogers 1991: 130.

<sup>78</sup> Barker-Benfield 1992: 360-361; Bermingham 2005: 9. Markman Ellis has argued that the politicisation of sensibility had in fact largely occurred by the end of the 1780s; the sensibility controversy was 'constitutive of the Revolution controversy [...] and not just a symptom of it'. (Ellis 1996: 198)

resulted from the rise of capitalism, together with the emergence of a middle class and new social values. This study will argue that these key developments played a decisive role in shaping the beggar imagery that came into being during the period. The move from a broadly paternalistic system to a market economy not only led to increased hardship for the poor but also created unease among the middle class about the growing disparity of wealth in Britain. Both philanthropy and sentimentalism can be understood as responses to this disquiet, although the economic causes of social inequality were yet to be acknowledged. This thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the beggar imagery can contribute to an understanding of these significant socio-economic, cultural and political transformations that characterised this period.

### Section Three: Investigating "the beggar"

Although this thesis examines the image of the beggar during the period from around 1760 to 1820, it is important in so doing also to consider the historical figure of the mendicant during the same period. This will make clear the ways in which the imagined construction of "the beggar" departs from the historical phenomenon of mendicancy, even though social reality and cultural representation can never be entirely separated. The historical figure of the beggar has been the focus of a considerable body of research by the social historian Tim Hitchcock; drawing on a wide range of sources, from criminal records to personal documents, Hitchcock has created what he terms 'a new kind of 'history from below' that attempts to recover the lives of individual paupers in eighteenth-century London.<sup>79</sup> The capital city provides the context for this section, which addresses not only the historical evidence concerning London beggars in the eighteenth century, but also London as the centre where images of the figure were produced and viewed.

For present purposes, the most significant point made by Hitchcock is that the stereotypical image of the beggar in the eighteenth century was not representative of those found begging on London's streets. His research shows that the majority of the city's beggars were women, either married or widowed, and accompanied by children. Male beggars were relatively few; most of them were older and disabled, often as a result of war, though the city streets were also populated by a significant number of the male black beggars who arrived in London in the 1780s as refugees from slavery or America.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 233.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 4, 9; Hitchcock 2005: 495.

By contrast, the stereotypical image of the beggar in contemporary culture was that of 'a lonely male [...], pursuing a well-defined profession – a healthy adult, avoiding hard work through artifice, and seeking hard cash from strangers'. Although this image, created by the elite, was therefore misleading about 'who begged on the streets and why', it was nevertheless the image that informed both social discourse and social policy relating to the beggar.<sup>81</sup> Hitchcock examines earlier rogue literature for the sources of this stereotype but offers little evidence of visual precedents; this therefore remains to be investigated.

However, in his discussion of eighteenth-century visual culture, Hitchcock focuses on the depiction of London's poor more generally rather than restricting his analysis to clearly identifiable begging figures. He draws much of his material from the English tradition of the London Cries and from images derived from this tradition, such as William Hogarth's *The Enraged Musician* (1741), that represent activities he terms the 'beggarly' or 'pauper professions'.<sup>82</sup> Since begging was illegal under the vagrancy laws, many of the urban poor legitimised their presence on the streets by combining begging with roles such as that of ballad-seller; it is to this practice that Hitchcock refers in identifying the stereotypical mendicant as someone 'pursuing a well-defined profession'.<sup>83</sup> However, although visual representations of the pauper professions in the London Cries constitute a significant body of images, which this thesis will address, they remain distinct from images of the mendicant as such. Hitchcock's claim that the stereotypical figure of the beggar was found 'in the art [...] of the eighteenth century' will therefore need to be subjected to critical scrutiny in the light of wider investigation into the art of the period.<sup>84</sup> His research into the pauper professions does, however, point to the fluidity of the category of "the beggar". In this context, he also notes the link between prostitution and begging, arguing that any young woman 'forced to beg for a living' was 'assumed to be sexually available'.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, historians have noted that the role of beggar was rarely permanent; King and Tomkins argue that 'relatively few people spent their entire lives in poverty defined as dependence upon poor relief or charity'.<sup>86</sup> Despite the historical evidence, however, visual representations of the beggar suggest that their identity as a social type is fixed; titles of

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<sup>81</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 209, 210.

<sup>82</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 74. Hitchcock's brief discussion of *The Enraged Musician* is addressed in Chapter 1.

<sup>83</sup> The vagrant, as one of the undeserving poor, was the subject of the vagrancy laws: the deserving poor came under the poor law. (Eccles 2012: 116)

<sup>84</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 209.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid: 93.

<sup>86</sup> King and Tomkins 2003: 267.

paintings such as *A beggar-man*, give the impression of a way of life rather than a temporary coping strategy.<sup>87</sup>

The London context in which such paintings of beggars were exhibited can help to explain the discrepancy between images of the beggar and the historical reality of the figure on the city's streets. As was discussed in Section One of this Introduction, with reference to the work of Hemingway and Solkin, these paintings would have been displayed in London exhibitions for a London audience, dominated by elite viewers, only the grandest and wealthiest of whom could afford actually to purchase these artworks. As Smiles has shown, moreover, the demands of the elite urban viewer played a crucial role in shaping the representation of rural life during this period. Building on the work of these scholars, this thesis will demonstrate that beggar images were constructed so as to mediate the sight of poverty for this audience. Paintings of the mendicant, however, comprise only a minority of the beggar images identified for this study; over eighty percent are prints. As Antony Griffiths shows in his study of European printmaking before 1820, the print industry, like the world of high art, was 'almost entirely based in London'.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the prices charged for high-end prints were considerably higher than the shilling admission fee charged for exhibitions; Griffiths notes how prices of such prints had quadrupled by the 1780s, with satirical prints costing as much as five shillings while large line-engravings were regularly priced at a guinea or more.<sup>89</sup> About two-thirds of the prints that depict beggars are either prints after paintings, satires or expensive topographical prints; although these prints might reach a wider audience geographically, their price restricted them to the more affluent. Illustrations for literary texts make up the remaining third of the graphic material that represents the beggar; some of these could find a wider market since cheap editions of illustrated texts were being printed by the end of the century.<sup>90</sup> The degree to which the same aesthetic constraints that applied to painting were also observed in representations of the beggar in the graphic media is an issue to be addressed. Throughout this thesis, understanding the social composition of the audience and its expectations of different types of image will be of key importance for interpretation.

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<sup>87</sup> Exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1771: no. 142.

<sup>88</sup> Griffiths 2016: 223.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid: 365. In addition to Griffiths' work on the wider European scene, I have made use of Timothy Clayton's important study of the eighteenth-century English print, as well as more recent scholarship. (Clayton 1997)

<sup>90</sup> St Clair 2004: 349.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the significance of gender as well as class in considering the audience for images of the mendicant. Following feminist theorisations of the gaze as an expression of dominance and desire, representations of the aestheticised female beggar, although relatively few, could function for the male viewer as objects of sexual attraction rather than as representations of poverty. In sentimentalism, however, the gaze is seen as the key to arousing sympathy; as Ann Jessie Van Sant has noted, 'in order to affect the heart, one must work through the eyes'.<sup>91</sup> Yet the sentimental gaze can also be erotic; Emma Barker has argued that 'the ambiguous mixture of eroticism and moralism that characterizes the sentimental construction of a youthful and innocent femininity' can prompt an equally ambivalent response in the viewer.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the sentimental gaze can, as the gaze of the privileged, potentially be a gaze of power, as suggested by Lynn Festa in a study of sentimental figures in the context of empire; 'sentimental identification', she argues, can operate as 'a form of differentiation' from an excluded object.<sup>93</sup> Viewing representations of the beggar in the sentimental mode, the spectator therefore has the choice of how to respond: whether to assume power over, or a sense of responsibility towards, the one beheld. Since many of the sentimental images of acts of benevolence to a beggar depict the compassionate response of a female almsgiver, this suggests that the elite female viewer would likewise respond with sympathy to the figure. These elite women not only constituted part of the exhibition audience but also, as Timothy Clayton has shown, featured in the subscription lists for prints.<sup>94</sup> Acknowledging the gendered difference in the reception of images of the mendicant has been important in this study.

The relationship between the beggar imagery and its intended audience is central to this thesis. It is clear that elite viewers chose to distance themselves from the social reality of the beggar found on London's streets, preferring instead an imagined construction of the figure. Whereas the fictitious mendicant of social discourse was, as Hitchcock claims, an idle rogue, the beggar depicted in the London exhibitions was an aestheticised figure, made palatable to the elite spectator. Moreover, most of the paintings examined in this study are scenes with a rural setting, far removed from the noise and dirt of the capital. The function of the beggar images was therefore not to draw attention to the mendicant's plight but rather to mediate the problem of poverty for the viewer. Just as Bermingham argues that the picturesque response to socio-economic change was to recognise but not challenge it,

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<sup>91</sup> Van Sant 1993: 28.

<sup>92</sup> Barker 2012: 96.

<sup>93</sup> Festa 2006: 5.

<sup>94</sup> Clayton 1997: 134.

so in representing the beggar, the figure was so constructed as to acknowledge poverty but at the same time to evade its moral consequences, thus reconciling the viewer to the effects of such change. In this way, the image of the beggar could function to assuage the consciences of the elite. The different means by which this was achieved, and the ways in which these changed over the years between circa 1760 and 1820, will be demonstrated in this study.

This thesis is structured in such a way as to trace the development of a beggar imagery in Britain between circa 1760 and 1820. After opening with an investigation into the emergence of this imagery in the early years of the period, the thesis examines subsequent developments in the representation of the mendicant in three thematic chapters which respectively consider the beggar as an object of sentiment, as a figure in the landscape, and as a comic stereotype. The final chapter looks at the ways in which artists responded to the hardening of attitudes towards mendicity in the later years of the period and addresses the subsequent decline in beggar imagery.

The first chapter investigates the early appearance of visual representations of the beggar in Britain in the years between circa 1760 and 1775. It opens by outlining the traditions of beggar imagery available to eighteenth-century British artists: namely, the two opposed European models of the false and the sacred beggar identified by Nichols, together with an English literary tradition of a fictitious company of merry beggars.<sup>95</sup> I look for any evidence of these traditions in earlier British art, before addressing the ways in which artists responded to these precedents in the years immediately after 1760. Their response is situated in the historical context of both the weakening of the moral economy as identified by Thompson, and the changing attitudes to charity that formed the subject of Andrew's research. Drawing on both literary and art-historical scholarship, I address the rise of sentimentalism in whose narratives the beggar now found representation as an object of sympathy. Although mendicants figured prominently in the sentimental literature of the 1760s and 1770s, their visual representation proved to be more problematic. The chapter concludes with a case study of Johan Zoffany's painting, *Beggars on the Road to Stanmore* (c. 1769-70), which serves as an example of how traditional beggar imagery was being adapted to meet the ideological needs of the *nouveaux riches* who had made their money in commerce. Taken as a whole, this opening chapter makes clear that by 1775, beggar imagery in Britain was only just beginning to emerge.

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<sup>95</sup> See Carroll 1996: 37-38.

Although the figure of the mendicant had rarely been represented in paint before 1775, the beggar thereafter became a popular subject in figure painting, typically appearing as a prompt to sympathy. The aim of the second chapter is to account for this new popularity by exploring representations of the mendicant in the sentimental mode, in the context of the anxieties about the growing inequality between rich and poor that so preoccupied contemporaries. The chapter opens with a discussion of the beggar as the subject of the fancy picture; although the number of surviving paintings is small, the fancy picture was the main genre in which the beggar found representation as a sympathetic figure. The discussion builds on the work of Postle by looking in particular at representations of two distinct beggar types: namely, the child and the blind man. This is followed by an examination of paintings that depict narrative scenes in which the beggar, as the recipient of charity, functions as part of an idealised, benevolent community. I conclude the chapter with a case study of Sir William Beechey's painting, *Portrait of Sir Francis Ford's Children giving a Coin to a Beggar Boy* (1793), which depicts both a child beggar and an act of benevolence. Overall, the chapter demonstrates how artists overcame the problems involved in representing the beggar as an object of sentiment, by finding ways to make their subjects palatable to the elite viewer.

The third chapter addresses the depiction of the beggar in the landscape, both in paintings and in the medium of print. It opens with a discussion of the representation of the vagrant in the countryside. The male vagrant was an ambiguous figure; although in the eyes of the elite, he was an alarming source of crime and disorder, he could also be depicted in a more sympathetic light as a victim of socio-economic change, representing those dispossessed as a result of the capitalist practices of enclosure and emparkment discussed earlier. Moving on to consider the picturesque landscape, the following section investigates whether the beggar was indeed a typical feature of this landscape, as several scholars have claimed. Both the theory and the practice of the picturesque are examined for evidence that would support this claim. The two final sections address representations of the improved landscape, both urban and rural, that was the antithesis of the picturesque. The key issue here is how, and if, the beggar could be accommodated in such scenes. I consider three London print series for the way in which they represent an urban landscape in the throes of improvement, before concluding with an investigation into representations of the landscape park. The theme of space runs through this chapter, which demonstrates how spatial practices created tensions between rich and poor; one consequence was that the

beggar became an uncomfortable presence who was in fact more absent than present in depictions of the landscape in these years.

The fourth chapter investigates representations of the beggar as a comic figure in the medium of print. Although the comic beggar featured in the literature of the period, as Simon Dickie has demonstrated in his work on mid-century jestbooks, there is little evidence of visual representations of this figure.<sup>96</sup> The virtual absence of images of the comic beggar is therefore the key issue that this chapter seeks to explain. It opens by examining how the depiction of the mendicant in graphic satire on social themes changed over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century in response to social and cultural developments. Book illustration forms the subject of the second section, which explores the problems faced by illustrators as they attempted to translate the comic literary stereotype of the beggar, as found in both the picaresque and the sentimental novel, into visual form. The third section makes a close study of representations of the beggar in the work of Thomas Rowlandson, seeking to discern in them the evidence they provide of the unease engendered by a modern commercial society. Here I challenge recent claims by scholars that the artist's work is fundamentally amoral. The chapter concludes by considering how the figure of the beggar was employed in the graphic satire on political themes of the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Overall, the chapter demonstrates how social, cultural and political developments made the visual representation of the beggar as a comic figure problematic and considers how successful artists were in responding to this challenge.

The final chapter focuses on the later years of the period following the French Revolution, with the aim of investigating if the resulting hardening of attitudes towards the beggar led to corresponding changes in the visual representation of the figure. The opening section looks for evidence in the beggar imagery of the increasing ascendancy of evangelical attitudes to charity, with their new emphasis on self-help and moral and spiritual reform. The focus of the second section is on the illustrations of notable London beggars that appeared in the new literary genre of the eccentric biography, that featured the lives of men and women who deviated from the social or physical norm. These texts, which formed part of contemporary attempts to classify the social and natural world, proved popular with the middle class. I examine not only how the beggar was represented in them but also the way that the figure functioned as a moral and physical deviant and, as such, a standard against which readers could measure their own normative status. An

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<sup>96</sup> Dickie 2014.



investigation of the beggar's presence in the graphic satire of the period follows; here, I look for any evidence that the concern with the problem of poverty, evident in both the Poor Law debates and the systematic enquiries into mendicity of the 1790s, resulted in a visual engagement with the beggar's suffering. The conclusion of the chapter moves into the years following the Napoleonic wars when attitudes towards mendicity hardened still further. A discussion of John Thomas Smith's etchings of London beggars and the comic illustrations of the Cruikshank brothers demonstrates the different ways in which artists responded to this decisive shift in public attitudes. The chapter as a whole, however, will argue that, despite these two late but short-lived developments, the years following the French Revolution saw little significant change in the representation of the begging figure.

This thesis makes its contribution to art-historical research by presenting a study of the phenomenon that was the body of beggar imagery produced in Britain in the period circa 1760 to 1820, in a wide range of media. Building on the existing literature that identifies the significant socio-economic, cultural and political changes that characterised the period, it aims to prove that the image of the beggar functioned to give visual expression to elite attitudes to these developments. In the conclusion to this project, I summarise the findings of the thesis that substantiate this claim, before ending with a coda that gives a brief overview of how the iconography of the begging figure was taken forward in the nineteenth century.

## Chapter One

### The early years of British beggar imagery

#### Introduction

The years 1760 to 1775 saw the gradual emergence of a new body of beggar imagery in Britain that had no precedent in British art. These images appeared at a time of significant socio-economic and cultural change in British society which led to a deterioration in relations between rich and poor. Whereas in the first half of the century poverty had been seen as part of God's providential plan whereby the rich could win salvation through acts of charity, thereafter it was increasingly regarded as a social problem. Moreover, the rise of a new free market model challenged the traditional paternalist ties of obligation of the rich to the poor. The gradual breakdown of the moral contract between the classes prompted new approaches to the problem of poverty; these provide the contexts in which the secular figure of the deserving beggar made an early appearance and can therefore be useful points of reference for understanding the development of this imagery.

First and foremost, the period saw an institutional response to the problem of poverty as evident in the philanthropic activity of these years. The historian Donna Andrew has argued that although some philanthropic initiatives had been established earlier in the century, the 1750s and 1760s saw a dramatic increase in such ventures.<sup>1</sup> The new organisational forms of philanthropy went hand in hand with new ideas about the logic and purpose of charitable endeavour. The emphasis now fell on the benefits that charitable work could bring to the nation, for example by helping the unproductive poor, a category that included the beggar, to become productive members of society.<sup>2</sup> In a significant new development, representations of the mendicant figure were used to illustrate material produced by London charitable institutions; these images will be discussed in the light of the new thinking.

The practical approach to poverty offered by the philanthropic institutions needs to be distinguished from the cultural response represented by the sentimental project. The sentimental response found expression mainly in the pages of fiction and placed emphasis

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew 1989: 74. Andrew differentiates philanthropy from charity for the former's wider aim of benefiting the nation. (Andrew 1989: 5)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: 6.

on the spontaneous, individual response to the sight of human suffering. Although it had precedents in earlier decades, it burgeoned after the mid-century, leading one literary scholar to refer to 'the sentimental 1760s'.<sup>3</sup> As in literature, the very earliest visual representations of the beggar in the sentimental mode depict the figure as an object of pity, serving to prompt a compassionate response in the viewer. Scholars such as G. J. Barker-Benfield have argued that sentimental fiction presents an ideal of class harmony where fellow feeling creates a bond between rich and poor.<sup>4</sup> The beggar's role in the early visual depictions of such idealised encounters will be a subject for investigation.

This chapter makes the case that by 1775, a new tradition of British beggar imagery had emerged as a response to this context of socio-economic and cultural change. The first two sections examine the evidence in early British art for the two European visual traditions of representing the beggar: namely, as an idle rogue and as one of the sacred poor. A key issue for the opening section will be why the tradition of the false beggar was never developed in Britain. The second section considers the ways in which artists developed the alternative tradition by recasting the beggar of religious art as a secular figure in the context of the charitable activity of the 1760s and 1770s. The following section addresses the gradual emergence of visual representations of the beggar in the sentimental mode. In investigating the slow progress of this development, I examine the obstacles that existed to the representation of the adult male mendicant as a wholly sympathetic figure. The chapter concludes with a study of Johan Zoffany's painting, *Beggars on the Road to Stanmore* (c. 1769-70); I make the case that this work illustrates both the ways in which established iconographic traditions were recast in these years, and the new functions that were found for the begging figure. The chapter as a whole charts the gradual emergence of a distinctive British beggar iconography that would be developed more fully in the following years.

### Section One: The idle rogue

The image of the idle rogue had a long history in European art. By the sixteenth century, the lazy beggar, who was usually male, had become an established subject, predominantly in the medium of print as appropriate to a low-life figure. If she/he did appear in paintings, it was in comic genre scenes, never as a subject for high art. As well as being characterised as idle, this figure type was frequently associated with feigned disability, leading it to be

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<sup>3</sup> Bell 2000: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Barker-Benfield 1992: 229.

condemned also for fraudulence. In the sixteenth century, as Tom Nichols has argued, lazy beggars served a didactic purpose for the elite viewer; their idleness both functioned to reinforce the importance of work and confirmed that their poverty was of their own making, thus providing moral justification for the elite withholding their alms.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-seventeenth century, however, Nichols argues that the idle rogue was now being represented as a less moralistic, more ambiguous figure. This argument had been anticipated by Lucinda Reinold who, in a dissertation on the representation of the rogue beggar in seventeenth-century Dutch art, contends that by 1600 the focus was more on individual beggar types as entertaining performers than on their evil nature.<sup>6</sup> Of particular relevance is her discussion of the beggar print series that comprised collections of rogues, many of whom were beggars, a typical example being Joris van Vliet's *Beggars and other low life* of 1632, in which roguish figures are shown on separate sheets.<sup>7</sup> Many are clearly depicted as able-bodied rogues who have chosen to live by begging rather than by work, which would make the inscription on the title-page of van Vliet's series, which translates as 'We live by charity', less a call for sympathy than a description of the beggars' lives (figure 1.1). This page also features two mendicants begging in front of a makeshift curtain, one a woman and the other a male strapped to a sledge and apparently disabled, while a man leans over to put a coin in the woman's begging bowl. The curtain serves to emphasise the beggars' subordinate position as social outcasts but also, as Reinold argues, to suggest their theatrical role as performers, dependent on self-presentation to survive. She sees the function of these seventeenth-century beggars as to entertain rather than to highlight the sin of idleness.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, no comparable graphic tradition of representing the idle rogue appears to have existed in Britain during this era. This absence is all the more surprising given that William Carroll, writing about literary representations of poverty in Tudor and Stuart England, has discerned what he terms 'the Tudor obsession with the sturdy beggar'.<sup>9</sup> The most likely reason for this discrepancy is the absence of a sophisticated British print culture such as existed in Northern Europe. Nor is there any evidence that prints of the Dutch beggar series were available in England before the 1760s, although comical low-life genre paintings were certainly being imported from the Netherlands by the early eighteenth

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<sup>5</sup> Nichols 2007a: 87; 2007b: 37.

<sup>6</sup> Nichols 2007a: 236; Reinold 1981: 82.

<sup>7</sup> Reinold 1981: 69ff. The artist is more commonly known as Jan van Vliet.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid: 69, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll 1996: 83. Carroll defines the sturdy beggar as 'the man or woman fully capable of work but refusing to seek or accept it'. (Carroll 1996: 39)

century.<sup>10</sup> One British print, dating from around 1700, does appear at first sight to recall the Dutch tradition of the comic low-life beggar, depicting as it does a lame hunchback, his left leg held up in a sling (figure 1.2). However, in the satirical tale which the print illustrates, the hunchback appears not as an idle rogue but rather as a foolish victim; the print shows his dispute with a blind beggar over an oyster being settled by a lawyer who takes the meat and hands back the empty shells. This print thus does not borrow from the Dutch tradition; not only is it a narrative scene in which the greedy lawyer, rather than the beggars, is the target of the satire but it also has no iconographic parallel in the Dutch series.<sup>11</sup>

The only other image of a low-life beggar produced in Britain before 1760 that I have traced is a much more familiar work. In William Hogarth's print sequence, *Industry and Idleness* (1747), the crippled beggar is similarly represented as a more or less benign comic figure with none of the moral condemnation that characterised the Northern European tradition of the idle rogue. In the sixth plate, 'The Industrious 'Prentice out of his Time, & Married to his Master's Daughter', a scene set near London's Monument, the newly-wed Francis Goodchild, the former industrious apprentice, pays a group of musicians to cease their playing while his servant gives food left over from the wedding feast to a female beggar at the door (figure 1.3). The legless beggar seated on the left (who was identified early on as a well-known figure, Philip-in-the-tub) attempts to win money for his epithalamium.<sup>12</sup> In creating this figure Hogarth does appear to have borrowed from the iconographic tradition of the crippled beggar, as exemplified not only by van Vliet but also by the work of Pieter Bruegel.<sup>13</sup> However, as a real-life figure, Philip-in-the-tub's physical appearance must have been the deciding factor in his representation. He is clearly not an idle rogue since the extent of his disability obviously leaves him unable to work. Had he been a false beggar, he would surely have been identified as such in John Trusler's commentary on the plate in *Hogarth moralized*, published in 1768, which, rather than condemning the beggar as idle, expresses sympathy for his 'unhappy want of limbs'.<sup>14</sup> Although a social 'other', beyond the polite world that Goodchild has risen to inhabit, this beggar does not threaten but entertains the viewer. If Hogarth's image does draw on the iconography of the Dutch beggar series, it strips the figure of his negative moral charge.

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<sup>10</sup> Mount 1991: 24.

<sup>11</sup> Two later versions of this image were published in 1779 and 1780.

<sup>12</sup> John Trusler makes this identification. (Trusler 1768: 83-84)

<sup>13</sup> Hogarth may have known work by the Bruegel family which featured in London art sales from at least the 1720s. (Mount 1991: 231)

<sup>14</sup> Trusler 1768: 84.

Furthermore, unlike their counterparts in the earlier Dutch beggar series, the two beggars in Hogarth's print are not isolated theatrical performers but instead situated in a moral and social context. They form part of a hierarchical community where the rich meet their paternalistic obligations to the poor. The propertied classes, here represented by Goodchild, provide for the poor; his servant offers food to the beggar woman who fulfils her obligations by kneeling in a show of deference with gratitude evident in her facial expression. Goodchild makes a further display of benevolence in his payment to the musicians who are exercising their customary right to celebrate a wedding with rough music.<sup>15</sup> Since the crippled beggar does not appear in either the preliminary sketch or the print study for this plate, it is possible that Hogarth added him to the final version not only to counterbalance the beggar woman on the right but also to complete the circle of benevolence initiated by Goodchild, thereby emphasising the latter's virtue. Thus, Hogarth's beggars are shown as part of a paternalistic community in which the customary rights of the poor, both to charity and to practise rough music, are recognised in a celebratory image.

By the 1760s, however, the paternalistic social relations celebrated in Hogarth's print were manifestly under threat. I find evidence of the changing attitude to the poor in Trusler's commentary of 1768 which, although it recognises that Hogarth's print promotes benevolence, also warns that it demonstrates 'the extravagance of custom' insofar as the rough music has become an excuse for criminal extortion. Such, he notes ominously, 'is the pernicious prevalence of some customs, supported, and, encouraged, by the ill-judged liberality of the public'.<sup>16</sup> Trusler's evident distrust of the mob and questioning of popular custom came two years after extensive food riots when troops were brought in to deal with rioters demanding the right to subsistence following a poor harvest. Such riots were an example of what E. P. Thompson has termed 'the moral economy of the crowd' which prompted men to act in the belief that they were defending traditional customs.<sup>17</sup> Although the government responded by taking action against profiteering, this was the last occasion on which they did so; historians have argued that thereafter the custom of markets was increasingly under attack.<sup>18</sup> Trusler's views can be assumed to be representative of those who bought his edition of Hogarth's works; at £1 16s a copy, these readers would have

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<sup>15</sup> It was a custom in London for butchers' men with cleavers and marrowbones to attend wedding parties and to make music until paid off with money or beer. (Thompson 1993: 484 n. 3)

<sup>16</sup> Trusler 1768: 84.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson 1993: 207, 188.

<sup>18</sup> Hay and Rogers 1997: 110.

been the elite. This shift in attitude towards the poor and their customary rights supports the argument made by the historian Lynn Hollen Lees that the easy interaction in the community between rich and poor that she finds celebrated in Hogarth's print, would disappear from visual images in the second half of the century.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, as has been shown, no evidence exists for a tradition of the idle rogue in British visual representation. In literature, however, the false beggar had long been a popular figure. In contrast to official discourse condemning the sturdy beggar, William Carroll identifies two literary fictions that romanticise the life of the mendicant. One fiction imagined beggars as members of a criminal fraternity, organised on hierarchical lines with their own canting language; the other was the related tradition of the merry beggar, living a life free from care.<sup>20</sup> The latter figure appears in several broadside ballads that have survived from the seventeenth century, printed on one side of a sheet of paper and produced for the lower end of the market. Typical is the ballad of *The Cunning Northerne Begger* [sic] (1634?), whose narrator boasts,

I Am a lusty begger [sic],  
and live by others giving,  
I scorne to worke...

This rogue is, however, presented as a purely comic performer.<sup>21</sup> Although these ballads are illustrated, the simple woodcuts depict stock figures who are characterised as neither good nor bad; the *Northerne Begger* is represented as a jaunty figure whose scrip and staff identify him as a mendicant but not as an idle rogue (figure 1.4). This tradition had largely died out by the mid-eighteenth century; a rare and possibly unique surviving example of the merry beggar ballads from this period is *The Merchant's Son, and the Beggar-Wench of Hull* (1763-75?), which relates how a beggar-wench tricked a young man and stole his clothes. Unusually, this idle rogue is female but, as in the earlier ballads, the tone is comic, and the simple woodcut illustration gives no indication of her deceit (figure 1.5).

By contrast, the fiction identified by Carroll of a fraternity of beggars not only survived into the eighteenth century but could still be found in the early 1800s. Such a fraternity appears in a broadside ballad still circulating in 1750, although again the stock figures in the woodcut give no indication of knavery (figure 1.6).<sup>22</sup> The continuing popularity of this fictitious society of rogue beggars is evident from texts such as the ballad opera, *The Jovial*

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<sup>19</sup> Lees 1998: 94.

<sup>20</sup> Carroll 1996: 37-38, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Anon. 1634?

<sup>22</sup> Anon. 1750?

*Crew*, which continued to be published into the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>23</sup> The fiction is also referenced in the beggar's introduction to John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* that was first produced in 1728 and was still being played in the nineteenth century; in his opening remarks, the beggar claims the work to have been originally performed by a company of beggars at St Giles's.<sup>24</sup> Similarly successful was the book, *The life and adventures of Bampfylde-Moore Carew*, which first appeared in 1745 and had run through at least thirty editions with varying titles by 1800 as well as being abridged for broadsides and inexpensive chapbooks.<sup>25</sup> The title character joins a company of mendicants, rising to become King of the Gypsies or King of the Beggars, and earns a dishonest living as a merry beggar by the disguises he adopts. Yet none of his tricks is evident in the frontispieces to these different editions where he typically appears in a half-length portrait with only the book he holds, *The Laws of the Beggars*, indicating his lifestyle (figure 1.7).<sup>26</sup>

One explanation for the appeal of these literary accounts of beggar fraternities is suggested by John Barrell who argues that the community of mendicants shown in Carew's *Life* is 'imagined as a nostalgic alternative to modern, commercial England'.<sup>27</sup> If this simpler, more carefree life was to be seen in a positive light, the rogue beggars could not be represented as threatening creations: rather, comedy was necessary to distance the audience from the mendicants, allowing them to forget the issues of poverty and crime that might otherwise be raised. This more benign attitude to the beggar, evident in both the verbal and the visual traditions of representing the figure in Britain, contrasts with the earlier satirical Northern European tradition. Although the Dutch beggars could be similarly entertaining figures, they carried an element of social menace not found in the British traditions.

A further cultural context in which the idle beggar could have appeared is that of the Cries of London. The Cries had originated in the early sixteenth century as print series depicting the street-criers of the major cities of Europe such as Paris. In his study of the London Cries, Sean Shesgreen argues that the Cries from the late seventeenth century are characterised by an 'insistent pastoralism'; for the inhabitants of an ever-expanding

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<sup>23</sup> Brome 1731. The ballad opera was based on a seventeenth-century play by Richard Brome, with the same title.

<sup>24</sup> Gay 1728.

<sup>25</sup> Anon. 1745. Chapbooks were works of popular literature costing as little as one halfpenny; they had a wide circulation, being sold by itinerant pedlars, or chapmen.

<sup>26</sup> A later edition of 1789 adds three vignettes to the frontispiece, two of which illustrate the disguises adopted by Carew but do not make clear his deceit (figure 1.8).

<sup>27</sup> Barrell 1999: 234.



London, the idealised hawkers represented a simpler life with a nostalgic appeal not dissimilar from that of the mendicant crews.<sup>28</sup> Although, as Tim Hitchcock has made clear, hawking could often be a cover for begging, these later Cries aestheticised the poor in order to appeal to the elite print-buyer. Thus, for example, the ballad-seller in the *Cries of the City of London* of the Dutch artist, Marcellus Laroon, is represented as a well-dressed, if provocative, figure, belying the reality that ballad-selling was often an occupation of the destitute (figure 1.9). Originally published in 1687, Laroon's *Cries* continued to be reprinted into the early nineteenth century. Uniquely among the later Cries, Laroon's series includes a mendicant, *The London beggar*, whom Shesgreen has identified as a female idle rogue who had rented the young boy and dressed him to suggest penury in order to win sympathy and alms (figure 1.10).<sup>29</sup> He bases his claim on a late eighteenth-century account of the image although he also notes elsewhere that the figure appears in a subset of plates depicting persons of notoriety.<sup>30</sup> However, no distinguishing iconography identifies her as an idle rogue for the viewer.<sup>31</sup> In brief, the Cries produced before 1760 offer no undisputed evidence of the false beggar.

Nevertheless, Hitchcock suggests that figures from the Cries tradition, as represented in Hogarth's print, *The Enraged Musician* (1741), approximate to the elite perception of the stereotypical rogue beggar whom he identifies as a lone, able-bodied male, 'pursuing a well-defined profession' but avoiding hard work and 'seeking hard cash from strangers' (figure 1.11).<sup>32</sup> Hogarth's engraving, which Shesgreen reads as a satire on the more idealised figures of Laroon, depicts a scene near St-Martin-in-the-Fields where a heterogeneous group of street traders shout their cries, while at a nearby window an Italian violinist attempts to shut out the cacophony.<sup>33</sup> Arguing from their caricatured features, Hitchcock reads Hogarth's hawkers as rogues, 'drawn to mock their failings'.<sup>34</sup> However, these figures are not depicted as beggars, nor are they idle; the only figure who approximates to Hitchcock's stereotype is in fact female, the wretched ballad seller to the left. Moreover, Hitchcock ignores the prevailing comedy of this print which functions to distance London's low life from the elite viewer. For the male members of this elite

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<sup>28</sup> Shesgreen 2002: 177.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid: 70.

<sup>30</sup> The evidence cited is from James Granger's *A Biographical History of England* (1769). For the reference to the subset of plates, see Shesgreen 1990: 212.

<sup>31</sup> A porcelain figurine of the group (c. 1755-65) represents the beggar woman as a prettified and in no way duplicitous figure. (V&A: C.940-1919)

<sup>32</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 209.

<sup>33</sup> Shesgreen 2002: 104.

<sup>34</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 223.

audience, the comic disorder is offset by the pastoral and erotic note introduced by the figure of the milkmaid, reminiscent of Laroon's aestheticised figures. The visual evidence does not substantiate Hitchcock's claim that these hawkers are represented as rogues.

Hitchcock further makes reference to Paul Sandby's *Twelve London Cries done from the Life*, produced in 1760; here a case can be made for reading some of the subjects as embodiments of the idle rogue. In Edinburgh, some fifteen years earlier, the artist had produced several figure sketches of beggars; these exceptional studies are evidence of his interest in a figure usually avoided by other artists.<sup>35</sup> In his *Cries*, some among the subjects, such as his *Walking Stationer*, are given a sympathetic representation; the man's outstretched hat, staff and child guide are the traditional signifiers of the blind beggar.<sup>36</sup> However, other among his hawkers appear as more sinister rogues. The ragged figure selling 'gimy tarters', or sticks, and grinning defiantly, adopts a menacing pose, stick raised as if to beat the viewer (figure 1.12). The letterpress suggests that his sticks can be used not only to beat dust from clothes but also as 'a Stick to beat your Wives'; the scenes in the background do indeed show a man about to beat his wife, but also a wife about to beat her cowering husband. Shesgreen reads Sandby's figures as satirical, offering 'a new urban antipastoralism' in response to more prettified versions of the *Cries*.<sup>37</sup> However, in their account, John Bonehill and Matthew Craske read the series as moralising rather than humorous, finding the figures 'repellent', and highlighting their 'insolent conduct and moral degradation'.<sup>38</sup> It is unlikely that Sandby deliberately created repellent rogues since such would not have been to the public taste. However, if he intended his satires to be read as humorous, he miscalculated; the series failed to sell, demonstrating that contemporary taste was for an idealised version of low life or else for the rogue to be represented in a spirit of benign comedy. Although Sandby's work represents an attempt to establish the idle rogue as a beggar type in British visual culture, it failed to set a precedent.

Thus, it can be seen that there is no evidence in Britain of a visual tradition of the idle rogue equivalent to that of Northern Europe. In both art and literature before 1760, the beggar was represented as an essentially benign comic figure in contrast to the more harshly moralistic European tradition. Sandby's representations of the idle rogue do not mark a revival of this tradition: rather they serve to confirm that the elite viewer demanded that representations of low life be mediated either by comedy or by idealisation. Indeed,

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, BM Nn.6.51.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Sandby, *The Walking Stationer*, 1760. (BM 1904,0819.56)

<sup>37</sup> Shesgreen 2002: 125.

<sup>38</sup> Bonehill and Craske 2009: 133.

contrary to Hitchcock's claim for its presence, the false beggar as a subject for British art almost completely disappeared for the rest of the century.

### Section Two: The deserving beggar

Together with the European tradition of the idle rogue, eighteenth-century artists inherited an alternative tradition in which the beggar was represented as one of the sacred poor. God's poor, as they were known, consisted of those unable to work and therefore deserving of charitable aid; these types of the old and the very young, the sick and disabled, and women with children dependent on charity to survive, comprised the visual iconography of the deserving poor. In the medieval and early modern period poverty had been seen as part of God's providential plan whereby the sacred poor became the means by which the rich could win salvation through charitable acts. Andrew has argued that this belief persisted in Britain until at least the middle of the eighteenth century; the mutual obligations of charity and gratitude that existed in a paternalistic society were still seen as having an important spiritual function.<sup>39</sup>

In the European tradition the sacred beggar appears as the recipient of Christian charity in religious paintings in which the saints are represented either as giving alms or offering divine healing. In Raphael's *The Lame Man Healed by Peter and John* (1515-16), St Peter and St John the Evangelist stand amidst representatives of the sacred poor: the mother and baby, the young boy, and the two lame beggars, one of whom is being healed (figure 1.13). Although the grotesque deformity of the crippled man on the right links him iconographically to van Vliet's rogues, the religious context identifies him as one of the deserving poor: his ugliness here, as Nichols argues, serves as a foil to the classical grace of the two saints.<sup>40</sup> Following the Reformation, however, Catholic religious imagery became problematic in Britain on the grounds that it encouraged idolatry and superstition. Nevertheless, as Clare Haynes has argued with reference to the period 1660 to 1760, there were no hard and fast rules governing which images were permitted by the Anglican church. Although 'Popish' paintings that represented Catholic doctrines, such as representations of the Virgin Mary not in accordance with descriptions in the New Testament, were not allowed, images of biblical narratives were acceptable.<sup>41</sup> Haynes'

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew 1989: 15.

<sup>40</sup> Nichols 2007a: 154.

<sup>41</sup> Haynes 2006: 135, 77.

evidence is backed up by other scholars: for example, Timothy Clayton finds evidence of 'scripture history' prints being produced in the early eighteenth century, some as cheap woodcuts suitable for domestic display.<sup>42</sup>

Among the paintings of biblical narratives that were produced in Britain both before and during the period 1760 to 1775, a small number featured the sacred poor in New Testament scenes. Between 1735 and 1737 Hogarth painted two murals in oil on canvas to hang in St Bartholomew's Hospital in London. One was based on the parable of the Good Samaritan featuring an act of charity, although the recipient is not here one of the poor: the other showed *Christ at the Pool of Bethesda* (figure 1.14).<sup>43</sup> In St John's gospel, 'a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered', gathered to await the visits of an angel when the first to enter the pool would be healed.<sup>44</sup> When Christ came to the pool, he found a lame man who, because of his disability, could never be that first to enter. In an act of divine charity, Christ healed him; it is this act that Hogarth depicts in his mural. Here, the traditional figures of the sacred poor are shown surrounding Christ, the lame man at his feet, the blind man with his staff and the woman and child. In representing divine charity, the painting forms the counterpart to the human charity shown by the Good Samaritan.<sup>45</sup>

However, charity was increasingly being regarded in more secular terms as a means to further the social good rather than to benefit the individual soul. Brent Sirota, writing about the eighteenth-century 'age of benevolence', has defined this process of secularisation as 'the unmistakable outward movement from church to world'.<sup>46</sup> Hogarth's murals illustrate this process; although they portray both divine and human acts of charity, their physical location in the Hospital places the emphasis on the social rather than the spiritual significance of charity. Paintings of divine acts of healing had traditionally been found in Catholic charitable foundations, so Hogarth's Bethesda mural was following in this tradition; St Bart's was a charitable institution which had catered for the sick poor since the twelfth century. The murals were placed on the staircase leading to the Great Hall where their message of the importance of charity was then reinforced by the donor boards that confronted the visitor; here were recorded the names of those whose donations were making possible the rebuilding of the Hospital and so furthering its work. Andrew has

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<sup>42</sup> Clayton 1997: 80.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Hayman also used the subject of the Good Samaritan for an altarpiece at Cusworth Hall (1751); William Hoare painted the scene at Bethesda for the altarpiece of the Octagon Chapel in Bath (1767).

<sup>44</sup> John 5.3.

<sup>45</sup> Hogarth could have been familiar with the representation of a divine act of healing in Raphael's *The Lame Man Healed by Peter and John*, available as a print in the early eighteenth century. (Clayton 1997: 52)

<sup>46</sup> Sirota 2014: 258.

identified many such donors to London charitable institutions as men of new wealth, such as bankers or merchants.<sup>47</sup> The donor boards thus proclaimed the social virtue of benevolence as much as its spiritual benefits. Furthermore, they provide evidence of the way in which private individuals, as Sirota has argued, 'increasingly took it upon themselves to publicly minister to the needs of society' where before this would have been the work of the Church and the state. Indeed, charity became an obligation of civic life.<sup>48</sup>

A clear example of the new ethos can be found in the work of the London Hospital, founded in 1740 to treat the sick and injured poor and one of several general hospitals founded in London around the middle of the century. Governors and subscribers saw their donations as directly benefiting the public good; the work of the Hospital enabled men, and in particular 'Manufacturers' and 'Seamen in Merchant-Service', to be restored to the workforce, so reducing the need for poor relief.<sup>49</sup> To promote its work, the Hospital made use of visual imagery; among the printed material it produced is a very early example of the figure of the beggar being used in a secular context to represent the impotent, deserving poor who were the objects of the Hospital's charity (figure 1.15). Heading a Hospital invitation, a roundel depicts an allegorical female figure wearing a castellated crown, possibly representing the Hospital, who is assisting a female beggar. As a woman, clearly unable to support herself and with a crutch at her side, this beggar is indisputably one of the deserving poor; the sacred beggar has here been recast as a secular figure. The scene in the background, which shows the Hospital building and an injured worker being carried on a stretcher, further promotes the institution as a new form of charity, signifying the nation's benevolence.<sup>50</sup> This image had replaced an earlier letterhead showing only the front elevation of the Hospital, and continued to be used, largely unchanged, into the early nineteenth century. Where the Hospital provides a practical response to the problem of poverty, the visual image offers a conceptual response with both institution and image advertising the social benefits that charity can bring.

As the emphasis shifted from the spiritual benefits of the act of giving for the donor to its wider benefits to the nation, discrimination in the administration of aid took on a new importance. Although this was not a new concern, wealthy subscribers to the new charities now sought reassurance that their donations went only to relieve the worthy. Andrew has

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew 1989: 76-77.

<sup>48</sup> Sirota 2014: 258, 257.

<sup>49</sup> Anon. 1756.

<sup>50</sup> Another example of a representation of a London hospital that includes a beggar is *A View of the Hospital of Bethlehem* (c.1760) which is discussed in Chapter 3.

noted how religious thinkers increasingly laid stress on the importance of discrimination in the context of philanthropy.<sup>51</sup> Support for this claim can be found in a sermon preached by Bishop Hume at a service for the London Hospital in 1762: 'there is', he warns, 'doubtless a degree of caution necessary in the exercise of Charity', but by donating to the Hospital, 'the charitable know always where they may place their Charity, without fear of mistakes'.<sup>52</sup> Further reassurance for subscribers can be found in the rules for the Hospital that stipulated that 'no one be assisted with either Advice or Medicines, who asks Alms in the Street, except in extraordinary Cases', so stressing the particular need for discrimination in dealing with the beggar.<sup>53</sup> Rigorous scrutiny was needed to ensure that charity went only to the deserving.

If the charitable aims of the London Hospital were to further the public good, other ventures had a more specifically patriotic aim. The Marine Society, another London-based charity, was founded in 1756 with the aim of taking poor boys from the London streets and placing them in the navy where they could serve the country. It thus sought to rescue the young from a life of mendicancy and turn them into productive members of society. Like the London Hospital, the Marine Society also used the visual image of the beggar to promote its work; a draft trade-card shows a group of ragged beggar boys, whose youth marks them as deserving, leaving their impoverished families on the right, to be transformed into the patriotic sailors seen on the left, while in the centre the boys are presented to the figure of Britannia, 'For the service of our country' (figure 1.16). The card functions both to advertise the work of the Society and to encourage donations for a charity that so clearly served the nation. In religious art, divine healing had transformed the sacred beggar for the greater glory of God; here, it is charitable work that is transforming the secular, deserving mendicant, but for patriotic purposes.

Patriotic concerns informed representations of the former soldier now forced to beg; as one who had served his country, he was clearly marked as deserving. In two early artworks the begging veteran appears, exceptionally for the time, as a figure of social critique. A pen-and-ink watercolour by Sandby of the King's Gate at Windsor shows a beggar, identified by Matthew Craske as 'an invalid of war', being rebuffed by a passing cleric (c. 1765: figure 1.17).<sup>54</sup> Such critique finds more explicit expression in a print published by John Collier in 1773, in a collection of his engravings under the title of *Human Passions*

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<sup>51</sup> Andrew 1989: 42.

<sup>52</sup> Hume 1762: 14, 13.

<sup>53</sup> London Hospital 1757: 11.

<sup>54</sup> Craske 2009: 55.

*Delineated* [...] *Designed in the Hogarthian style*.<sup>55</sup> This print, *The Pluralist and Old Soldier*, depicts a beggar, identified in the letterpress as a former soldier who had lost a leg at Guadeloupe during the Seven Years War, being spurned by a 'well-fed Pluralist' who rejects his plea for alms (figure 1.18). As clergymen who profited from holding several livings, pluralists came under frequent attack from contemporaries.<sup>56</sup> Collier's pluralist, true to form, refuses the beggar's request, telling him to find work or else return to his parish of settlement where he would qualify for poor relief. The social critique here has two targets: the hypocrisy of a clergyman who preaches, but does not practise, charity, and the injustices of the poor law. As the beggar makes clear, he has no home parish since he was born while his father was on active service; ineligible for parish relief and unable to work because of his disability, he is reduced to begging. The moral worth of one who has served his country is here contrasted with the hypocrisy of the pluralist. Although the beggar is a grotesque figure, owing much to Hogarth, the context is not comic; as the victim of injustice, this mendicant is clearly one of the deserving poor. The print provides further evidence of the shift that was occurring in attitudes to poverty which was now regarded not as providential but rather as a social problem requiring a practical response such as was seen in the charitable activity of this period.<sup>57</sup>

Although Hogarth's murals had offered early evidence of an artist drawing on the European tradition of representing the beggar as one of the sacred poor, the following years saw the sacred beggar recast as a secular figure and one of the impotent, deserving poor. Early examples of this figure, however, appeared only in the informal graphic media with no direct reference to the European tradition of high art. Nevertheless, they provide evidence of the changing attitudes to poverty which was now seen as a social problem: in this respect, the image of the deserving beggar in Collier's image can be read as an early call for action.

### Section Three: The Man of Feeling

In contrast to the institutional response to the problem of poverty represented by charities such as the London Hospital, the sentimental project that achieved such prominence in the

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<sup>55</sup> The volume was issued under the pseudonym, Timothy Bobbin. (Bobbin 1773)

<sup>56</sup> In 1769, for example, one 'Philolethes' wrote a poem on the subject, complaining that these 'graceless Jobbers hoard the golden Grain', so that 'Pluto's pleas'd, while Poverty's in Pain'. (Philolethes 1769: 3)

<sup>57</sup> A similar satire of a hypocritical clergyman appears in an anonymous print of 1773, *Charity Begins at Home*, although the beggar is here not a veteran but a woman with her child. (BM 2010,7081.354)

1760s represented a more individualistic approach. It has been read as a cultural response to the weakening of social bonds in a commercial society; fellow feeling was proposed as the basis of social relations and the response to poverty became one of sympathy and acts of benevolence.<sup>58</sup> Whereas the charitable institutions strove to further the wider public good in practical ways, sentimentalism addressed itself to the field of personal relationships as the means of regenerating society. However, the individual almsgiving which sentimentalism encouraged was increasingly under attack; not only was it believed to encourage dependence, but it was also coming to be recognised as an inadequate response to social problems.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, individual acts of benevolence frequently appeared in imaginative representations of sentimentalism where the recipient could be a beggar; it is the mendicant's presence in these scenes that will form the subject of the following section. Whereas the sentimental encounter with the beggar featured prominently in the literature of the period, it was slower to find visual representation: two early paintings have survived, however, that do depict the begging figure in a sentimental scene. These are Edward Penny's *The Marquis of Granby giving Alms to a sick Soldier and his Family* (1764) and John Kitchingman's illustration of 1775 of an episode from Henry Mackenzie's novel, *The Man of Feeling*. A discussion of these two artworks will make clear the problematic nature of representing the beggar as a subject for high art and the ways in which artists addressed this issue.

The importance of the moral sense in models of society had been addressed by several philosophers in the eighteenth century in works that have attracted a considerable body of scholarship. At the beginning of the century, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury had made a case for man's innate moral sense and natural instinct for virtue.<sup>60</sup> In David Hume's work in the middle of the century, the notion of the moral sense was superseded by a more complex model of human relations; introducing the idea of sympathy, Hume argued for the feelings as the basis for moral life.<sup>61</sup> Here, however, I refer specifically to the model of social relations proposed by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which was published at the beginning of the period covered by this chapter. Building on the work of the earlier philosophers, Smith develops further the idea of sympathy and introduces his concept of an 'impartial spectator'; in so doing, he provides a clear account of the sentimental encounter with the suffering figure which has direct relevance to

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<sup>58</sup> Lamb 2009: 43.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew 1989: 143; Bell 2000: 50.

<sup>60</sup> Shaftesbury 1964.

<sup>61</sup> Hume 1978.



representations of the beggar. More complex than that of his predecessors, Smith's account of society can be related to the ethical dilemmas of the period.

Like Hume, Smith argues for the feelings as the basis of moral life, valorising sympathy whereby one person thinks themselves into the feelings of another: 'I consider what I should suffer if I was really you'.<sup>62</sup> The capacity for this response is sensibility, a sensitivity both physiological and emotional. However, although Smith sees sympathy as the basis for human relations, it cannot be indiscriminate: accordingly he develops the concept of 'the impartial spectator' who acts as an 'equitable judge', assessing the 'propriety of conduct' of the one who makes claim to sympathy.<sup>63</sup> Judgement will depend on information regarding the victim's situation but also on how their suffering is expressed; the authentic 'silent and majestic sorrow' that speaks for itself will elicit sympathy whereas a staged performance of 'clamorous grief' will not.<sup>64</sup> For Smith, it is the judgement of the impartial spectator that creates the moral norms that regulate society; the social virtues become those prompted by fellow-feeling, such as compassion and generosity, since Smith considers benevolent actions to be 'productive of the greatest good'.<sup>65</sup> His concern that benevolence should serve socially useful ends finds a parallel in the new emphasis noted in charitable endeavour on work that furthered the social good. The moral discourse of Smith's *Theory* complements the political economy expounded in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) where he moves from considering personal ethics to address the wider social processes in which mutual aid is found to arise from motives of self-interest rather than from feelings of benevolence.<sup>66</sup>

The sentimental encounter with distress or poverty found dramatic representation in the sentimental novels that reached the height of their popularity between the 1740s and 1780s. Several include episodes in which the encounter is with a deserving beggar who functions as a prompt to sympathy. Typically, she/he recounts a tale of misfortune to which the hero or heroine responds with compassion and often an act of benevolence, in a demonstration of sensibility. David Denby has argued for such scenes as tableaux in which the narrative is temporarily suspended to present the encounter between the protagonist and the suffering figure for the reader's contemplation.<sup>67</sup> In the tableau, a character's sympathy is aroused by the beggar but so, too, is that of the reader who is also a witness of the scene. James

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<sup>62</sup> Smith 2007: 395.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid: 286, 91.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid: 29.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid: 48, 99.

<sup>66</sup> Smith 1991.

<sup>67</sup> Denby 1994: 75-77.

Chandler has described this triangular structure as 'a system of looking at lookers looking'; it functions as both a moral and an aesthetic structure to become, as Chandler argues, 'a hallmark of the sentimental mode'.<sup>68</sup> Such encounters with the suffering beggar feature in many of the sentimental novels published between 1760 and 1775: so, in Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765-1770), the hero Henry finds a beggar boy, 'half naked, and whining and shivering with cold'. Henry's heart, as well as the reader's, is 'instantly touched with wonted compassion' and he responds by offering the boy some of his own clothes.<sup>69</sup> The reader experiences a vicarious pleasure in contemplating this act; it is the same emotion that Smith describes when, as witnesses of the 'benevolent affections', 'we enter into the satisfaction both of the person who feels them, and of the person who is the object of them'.<sup>70</sup> In this way such tableaux function to promote the fellow feeling which is the basis of a humane society, with the attendant social virtues of benevolence and compassion.

The idealised communities represented in these tableaux, however, remain ideals, existing only in the imagination. In his discussion of the sentimental novel as an arena in which models of social understanding could be explored, John Mullan argues that the types of society represented are 'fragile constructions'. The virtues upheld are indeed admirable but are seen only to exist in contexts removed from the world; they have no place in the commercial society that is represented in these novels, 'in which fellow-feeling was rare and malevolence prevailed'.<sup>71</sup> The fictional encounter with the beggar often takes place in a rural setting, suggesting that sympathy and benevolence can only be found away from the city. Moreover, in the sentimental novels, the capacity for sensibility is confined to the privileged few. Scholars have argued that such was the premium set on sensibility that it came to be seen by an aspiring middle class as a mark not only of moral but also of social status.<sup>72</sup> The primary evidence supports this argument; Smith had made clear that sensibility could never be a quality accessible to all but was beyond 'the rude vulgar of mankind'.<sup>73</sup> If sensibility was considered exclusive, then the benevolence it prompted could be as much a public display of self-worth as a purely altruistic gesture. Sentimentalism had

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<sup>68</sup> Chandler 2013: 12, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Brooke 1906: 47.

<sup>70</sup> Smith 2007: 48.

<sup>71</sup> Mullan 1988: 4, 8, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Dixon 2015: 83; Barker-Benfield 1992: 9. In conferring moral and social status, sensibility could perform for the middle class a similar function to philanthropic activity.

<sup>73</sup> Smith 2007: 30.

an important ideological function but, as Michael Bell has argued, could not provide a model for society as a whole.<sup>74</sup>

The visual tradition of the sentimental encounter with the begging figure developed more slowly than the literary tradition. The earliest extant painting of such a scene is Edward Penny's *An officer relieving a sick soldier*, exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1765, shortly after the end of the Seven Years' War (figure 1.19). Although only referred to as 'An officer' in the catalogue, visitors to the exhibition were likely to have recognised the subject as the Marquis of Granby, a popular military hero of the time.<sup>75</sup> The identification was made clear in the caption added to the print of the painting which was highly successful, evidencing the painting's popularity and patriotic appeal.<sup>76</sup> In this moving scene, Granby is shown on horseback reaching for money to give to a sick soldier seated at the side of the road while his wife and children look on in amazement at the great man's gesture. Behind and to the right of the Marquis can be seen his cavalry whose presence makes clear that the soldier is one who has served his country. The soldier's pallor, seated position and downcast eyes emphasise his present suffering although it is his son who begs for him, holding out his cap. David Solkin has noted the transitional nature of Penny's painting insofar as it makes pictorial reference to earlier religious images of the Good Samaritan and, more pertinently, of St Martin, the soldier saint shown on horseback, dividing his cloak with a beggar in an act of charity. Solkin further notes the secular precedents for Penny's iconography such as the Justice of Trajan where the Emperor on his way to battle stops to answer a woman's plea.<sup>77</sup>

However, in representing a secular act of benevolence and a modern, not an historical, subject, Penny has created a visual image of the sentimental encounter using the structure of the tableau familiar from contemporary literature. Indeed, although viewing the painting was, for visitors to an exhibition, a social experience, the perusal of the print would be more akin to the private experience of reading a novel. Solkin has provided a full analysis of this painting as representing the public hero in his private capacity; however, it can also be read as a sentimental tableau where the suffering of the begging figure makes an appeal to the sensibility of both Granby and the viewer.<sup>78</sup> For a military hero to demonstrate the social virtues of compassion and benevolence shows the social value now set on displays

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<sup>74</sup> Bell 2000: 117.

<sup>75</sup> Granby is identified in Horace Walpole's annotation to his exhibition catalogue.

<sup>76</sup> Solkin 1993: 293, fn. 96.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 203.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid: 199ff.

of sensibility. By 1777, Hugh Blair could write in a sermon, 'manliness and sensibility are so far from being incompatible, that the truly brave are, for the most part, generous and humane.'<sup>79</sup> Moreover, Granby demonstrates the discrimination demanded by Smith in the exercise of sympathy. As already seen in the work of Collier and Sandby, the figure of the soldier as one who has served his country was recognised as indisputably a deserving figure and is here one who may with aid be enabled to fight again. He functions as a prompt for the display of sympathy that demonstrates Granby's moral worth. Penny's painting marks a transitional moment in the representation of the sentimental encounter with the begging figure. In representing an act of charity to a deserving soldier in distress, in the medium of paint, the artist prepared the ground for later scenes of charity to one who was an actual beggar.

The adult male beggar, however, was still too morally problematic a figure for the elite viewer. He did not have the patriotic appeal of the soldier, nor was he so clearly deserving. Smith speaks for these viewers when he declares, 'we despise a beggar; and, though his importunities may extort an alms from us, he is scarce ever the object of any serious commiseration'.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the ragged and dirty beggar is an aesthetically displeasing figure; John Aikin, writing in 1775 primarily about literature, stressed that 'to make pity pleasing, the object of it must not in any view be disagreeable to the imagination'.<sup>81</sup> The challenge for the artist who would represent the beggar as an object of sentiment was therefore to construct a figure who would not repel but have a certain dignity. It was a similar challenge to that identified by Barrell as one in which the artist had to shield the elite viewer from the dirt, and the torn and patched clothing of the rural labourer. In the sentimental novel, an author can direct the reader's response through emotive language or can make clear the change of fortune that has forced a person to beg.<sup>82</sup> The artist, however, has no recourse to such verbal devices unless she/he chooses to attach some explanatory text, such as a poem, to a catalogue entry. Some visual equivalent to the rhetoric of literature needs to be found, such as representing the beggar as blind or lame, which many artists were to do. In this way, the artist could produce a visual analogue to the emotive language employed in fiction's touching scenes.

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<sup>79</sup> Blair 1777: III, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Smith 2007: 178.

<sup>81</sup> Aikin 1775: 205.

<sup>82</sup> Adam Smith had noted that 'the fall from riches to poverty, as it commonly occasions the most real distress to the sufferer, so it seldom fails to excite the most sincere commiseration in the spectator'. (Smith 2007: 178)

The only extant visual representation of a sentimental encounter with a beggar from the years to 1775 is John Kitchingman's *The beggar, as described in the Man of Feeling*, p. 29. Following its exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1775, a mezzotint after the painting by Henry Kingsbury was exhibited at the Society of Artists the following year as *The Beggar and his Dog* (figure 1.20). Significantly, the work illustrates a scene in Henry Mackenzie's sentimental novel, *The Man of Feeling* (1771) in which Harley, the man of feeling, encounters a beggar. This mendicant is by his own admission a dishonest rogue since although the victim of a series of misfortunes, he has now turned fortune teller and 'lying is, as you call it, my profession'.<sup>83</sup> The beggar's poverty-stricken appearance prompts Harley to give him sixpence but, having heard his tale, he is torn between prudence and benevolence over whether to give him more; his feelings triumph and he lets a shilling fall to the ground. Kitchingman's illustration assumes the viewers' familiarity with a novel whose popularity was such that it had run through five editions by 1774: no doubt Kitchingman decided to profit from the novel's success. In Mackenzie's novel, Harley's encounter with the beggar illustrates the problematic nature of sentimentalism in a commercial world that Mullan had identified. If we read Harley's benevolence to a manifest rogue as naive, then we accept Maureen Harkin's verdict that Mackenzie highlights the 'inadequacies of sensibility as a basis for social practice'.<sup>84</sup> However, if we consider his action to be admirably generous, then the suggestion is that the commercial world has no place for such higher moral feelings. As other scholars have noted, we are left with the question of 'what morality is possible in a complex commercial world?'<sup>85</sup> With Harley's eventual death, this conflict of values remains unresolved.

Kitchingman's representation of Harley's encounter with the beggar captures some of the ambivalence of the text. There can be no doubt that the figure confronting the viewer is a beggar: his clothes are ragged, his feet bare and he holds out his cap for alms.<sup>86</sup> He confesses to being an idle rogue and indeed has none of the signifiers of the deserving poor for, as he himself admits, he lacks 'a wooden leg or a withered arm'; nevertheless, he does prompt Harley's act of benevolence.<sup>87</sup> For the viewer of Kitchingman's image, however, the beggar presents as a more problematic figure because of the theatrical nature of his appearance. He is a performer whose bald head and bushy eyebrows resemble a theatrical

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<sup>83</sup> Mackenzie 2005: 60.

<sup>84</sup> Harkin 1994: 321.

<sup>85</sup> Bending and Bygrave 2001: xx.

<sup>86</sup> 'For English adults to go barefoot was a sign of utter degradation'. (Styles 2007: 265)

<sup>87</sup> Mackenzie 2005: 61.

mask and whose pose, like that of his begging dog, is artfully contrived. The performative element distances the viewer rather than engages their sympathy, since it suggests that the beggar's apparent plight is an act. Although little of Kitchingman's oeuvre appears to have survived, there are two prints of portraits by him which represent actors in theatrical roles; his image of the beggar, too, suggests an actor playing a part.<sup>88</sup> Kitchingman's beggar is an ambivalent, not a sentimental figure; a visual language for the representation of the sentimental beggar had yet to be found.

Thus, it can be seen that although the sentimental encounter with the beggar was well-established in the literature of the 1760s and 1770s, the same was not true in the visual arts. The object of sympathy in Penny's early tableau was a worthy soldier, not a mendicant; when Kitchingman came to illustrate Harley's sentimental encounter with a beggar some ten years later, there was still no visual language in place in which the sentiment of the novel could find expression. The beggar he constructed was a comic figure, not yet an object of pathos. The representation of the beggar in the sentimental mode had yet to be developed.

#### Section Four: Johan Zoffany: *Beggars on the Road to Stanmore*

To conclude, this section will consider an exceptional painting that demonstrates both the transitional nature of the beggar images produced in the years 1760 to 1775 and the new ideological functions such images could perform for men of new wealth. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1771, *A beggar's family*, by the German-born Johan Zoffany, shows a family group of a mother nursing her baby, together with her young son and a much older man who would appear to be her father, suggesting that the woman has been left a single mother (figure 1.21). The absence of an adult male figure who could provide for this family makes clear the group's status as members of the deserving poor. As the title indicates, the family are beggars, if not vagrants; not only are they seen here on the open road but, in addition, the old man's hat has been placed in front of them as a begging bowl and already has a coin inside. The artist has observed aesthetic decorum for, although the mother's shawl is torn and her shoe half worn away, none of the figures is barefoot and all appear well fed. The painting is unusual among Zoffany's works whose genre scenes are more often comic: when he represents an Italian beggar in *A Florentine Fruit Stall* (c.

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<sup>88</sup> *Mr Macklin as Shylock*, 1784; *Mrs Yates as Alicia in Nicholas Rowe's 'Jane Shore'*, 1787. (O'Donoghue and Desmarais 2008)

1777), it is as a disreputable figure, ragged and barefoot, but part of a lively scene where the exposed breasts of the young market girls add a sexual innuendo wholly absent from the earlier work.<sup>89</sup>

By contrast, as Mary Webster has noted, the figures in *A beggar's family* make a pictorial reference to earlier religious images of the Holy Family with St John.<sup>90</sup> The image can, for example, be compared to Raphael's *The Holy Family under an Oak Tree*, which shows the same grouping of an old man, a young mother, and two children.<sup>91</sup> Zoffany, who had been baptised into the Roman Catholic faith as an infant, would undoubtedly have been familiar with this iconographic tradition. Further evidence of a religious reference can be found in the 'gesture of veneration' that Martin Postle identifies as being made by the old man in Zoffany's painting who kneels before the mother and child. Moreover, as unmistakable representations of the deserving poor, the family are the traditional objects of Christian charity, although no almsgiver appears in this scene. Postle has argued that visitors to the 1771 exhibition would have been aware of these artistic traditions: certainly, a print of Raphael's *Holy Family* was in circulation by 1776 (figure 1.22).<sup>92</sup> However, although aristocratic viewers might have been familiar with the Old Masters from the Grand Tour or even their own art collections, this would not be true of all Zoffany's audience. Nevertheless, whether or not recognised by the viewers, *A beggar's family* makes a clear reference to the European tradition of religious art.

Given the atypical status of the painting in Zoffany's oeuvre, it is almost certain that *A beggar's family* was a commission. Evidence shows that it was in the collection of the Drummond family soon after it was exhibited.<sup>93</sup> Zoffany certainly had connections with this family of bankers; not only was he a customer of Drummonds Bank but he had also been commissioned to paint a conversation piece, *The Drummond Family*, around the time he was working on *A beggar's family*. At some point the title of the painting was changed to *Beggars on the Road to Stanmore*; family tradition had it that the beggars were based on a group met by Zoffany on the road to Stanmore in Middlesex, where the family owned Stanmore House and its estate. As bankers, the Drummonds were men of new wealth; the founder of the family bank, Andrew Drummond, like many wealthy members of the urban

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<sup>89</sup> Johan Zoffany, *A Florentine Fruit Stall*, c. 1777. (Tate, London)

<sup>90</sup> Webster 2011: 266.

<sup>91</sup> Raphael, *The Holy Family under an Oak Tree*, 1518-20. (Prado, Madrid)

<sup>92</sup> Postle 2011: 226.

<sup>93</sup> Webster 2011: 266.

middle class, had bought land in the suburbs of London to build his new house as a symbol of his wealth.<sup>94</sup>

The noted philanthropy of the Drummond family has significance for the subject matter of Zoffany's painting. Andrew Drummond had, according to company historians, 'encouraged the new cult of middle-class, patriarchal concern for teaching the poor as well as feeding them'.<sup>95</sup> He is presumably the Andrew Drummond who appears on the list of governors of St George's Hospital in London in 1747; his name also appears among 'The Governors and Guardians' of the Foundling Hospital in 1739.<sup>96</sup> Penelope Treadwell has speculated that Andrew's nephews, Robert and Henry Drummond, who took over the running of the bank after his death in 1769, commissioned Zoffany's painting as a tribute to their uncle's philanthropy.<sup>97</sup> In this case, Andrew would be understood as the unseen benefactor who has just passed the beggars, for fresh horse dung lies on the road and not only is there a coin in the old man's hat but the young boy is holding one up to be seen. Treadwell's suggestion appears justified since the family are not performing their poverty for the viewer, gazing out of the picture: rather, the focus is on the act of benevolence with the old man kneeling in a show of deference and gratitude.

Read as a specific tribute to Andrew Drummond's benevolence, the painting acquires a further ideological function. The *nouveaux riches* such as the Drummonds had long been the object of suspicion, but, as James Raven has shown, on the evidence of popular imaginative prose published between 1750 and 1800, hostility to new wealth increased from the 1760s onwards. Such hostility he attributes not only to fears about both economic and social stability prompted by, for example, the risk-taking and extravagance of the newly rich, but also to social jealousy and 'a concern over the preserves of social status'.<sup>98</sup> It was no doubt to counter such hostility that, as noted earlier, many of the *nouveaux riches* became major donors to London's charitable institutions. Men of new wealth sought to establish their credentials as gentlemen by demonstrating 'the gentlemanly ideals of benevolence, economy, and a responsible attitude towards wealth', ideals that Raven finds promoted in the imaginative prose of the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>99</sup> Charity in particular became a mark of status; in *The Fool of Quality*, Brooke uses the benevolent acts

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<sup>94</sup> For the building of out-of-town residences as a symbol of middle-class wealth, see McKellar 2013: 151.

<sup>95</sup> Bolitho and Peel 1967: 28.

<sup>96</sup> Andrew's descendants appear to have continued the philanthropic tradition: the donor boards at St Bart's list an 'And<sup>w</sup>'. Drummond, *Esq*' and a 'H<sup>y</sup>'. Drummond, Jun. *Esq*' in 1790 and 1791 respectively, probably Andrew's great-nephews.

<sup>97</sup> Treadwell 2009: 148.

<sup>98</sup> Raven 1992: 251.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*: 11.



of the merchant, Mr Fenton, to demonstrate that he is indeed a gentleman, since 'one quality of a gentleman is that of charity to the poor'.<sup>100</sup> If the unseen benefactor is indeed Andrew Drummond, the painting would function not only to celebrate the family's benevolence but also to establish their credentials as gentlemen. So, when Robert Drummond hung *A beggar's family* at Cadland House in Hampshire, his new country house with grounds designed by Capability Brown, the painting represented a public affirmation of the family's status as gentlemen and a justification of their new wealth.<sup>101</sup>

In its portrayal of modern beggars as objects of sympathy, Zoffany's painting was exceptional for its time. However, from the one review to survive, it would appear that the public was not yet ready to accept the beggar as the subject of a sentimental scene. The review is worth quoting in full:

The small picture of the beggars is better done. But it has something of that oneness of colour I have spoken of, and represents disagreeable objects. I have said that the representation of ugliness is false humour: and I say the same of the representation of rags and nastiness. Not but that low, even *very* low, subjects may be entertaining. But the entertainment they afford will never proceed from ugliness or filth. What turns the stomach, when we see it in nature, will have the same effect, when we see it represented in painting.<sup>102</sup>

This critic cannot read the beggars as other than 'disagreeable objects' whose 'nastiness' makes them unsuitable even for comic representation. They are not yet for him signifiers of suffering and prompts to sensibility: rather, he responds with disgust to an image that turns his stomach as such an encounter would in life. The absence of a narrative context to explain the family's plight can in part explain the critic's bewilderment; so, too, can the absence of an almsgiver who could confirm for the viewer the validity of a sympathetic response. However, with no benefactor present in Zoffany's painting to guide the critic, he fails to recognise these beggars as actors in a sentimental scene. The painting thus remains a transitional work in the development of a visual tradition of representing the beggar in the sentimental mode.

Zoffany's painting remains exceptional for the years between 1760 and 1775 since not only did it represent the deserving beggar as the subject of high art, but it also marked the transition from the religious tradition of the sacred poor to the deserving poor as objects of

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<sup>100</sup> Brooke 1906: 159.

<sup>101</sup> Webster 2011: 266.

<sup>102</sup> Baker 1771: 20-21.

the sentimental gaze. However, in representing a family group of the familiar types of the impotent poor, it showed that the individual adult male beggar was not yet seen as deserving. If, as is most likely, the painting was a commission, then it further demonstrates the ideological function the figure of the beggar could now perform for the newly rich, anxious to demonstrate both their social status and their moral worth. Such was the exceptional nature of Zoffany's painting, however, that it appears to have merited no favourable reviews but rather to have been met with distaste. The visual representation of the beggar in the sentimental mode would need to be further developed before it could be fully understood.

### Conclusion

The years 1760 to 1775 witnessed the gradual emergence of a new British beggar iconography. The earlier European tradition in which the beggar was satirised as an idle rogue was not taken up by British artists. Although Hogarth had represented the beggar as a comic figure, his comedy was more benign than that of the earlier false beggars. A British literary tradition of the idle rogue did persist into the eighteenth century but here, too, the figure was a comic creation, often one of a carefree 'jovial crew'. Moreover, the simple woodcuts that illustrated these texts used stock figures of beggar types, none of which could be read as a rogue. In both visual and verbal contexts, comedy served the necessary function of mediating the low-life beggar for an elite audience. When Sandby attempted to represent some of the pauper professions with harsh satire rather than benign comedy, he did not meet with success and his *Cries* failed to set an artistic precedent.

By contrast, evidence of the alternative tradition that represented the beggar as one of the sacred poor and the object of Christian charity could still be found among the very few religious paintings to have been produced in Britain prior to 1775. However, as the focus of charity shifted from personal salvation to its social benefits, the sacred beggar was recast as a secular figure, although still signifying the need for charity. After 1760, this figure appeared in the medium of print, illustrating material issued by the charitable institutions where it functioned to promote the benefits of their work to the nation.

In high art, however, the representation of the secular deserving beggar as an object of charity was slow to develop. Penny produced an early visual representation of the sentimental encounter with the begging figure, familiar from contemporary literature, but the figure was a soldier, not a mendicant. Although Kitchingman painted an illustration of

Harley's encounter with the beggar in *The Man of Feeling*, he represented the beggar as comic rather than as an object of sentiment. Exceptionally for these years, Zoffany did represent a beggar's family in the sentimental mode as deserving objects of charity. However, the unfavourable review makes clear that the representation of such figures in high art remained problematic. Nevertheless, for those who could read *A beggar's family* as a sentimental scene, the painting offered an early example of the ideological functions the beggar could perform as a prompt to the benevolence that established the unseen donor's social status and justified his new wealth.

By 1775, therefore, the visual representation of the secular beggar as an object of charity was only just beginning to emerge in Britain. Until then only the types of the impotent poor had been depicted: the iconography of the individual, adult male beggar as deserving had not yet been established. In the early images the beggar functioned to validate charity in all its forms rather than to raise the problematic aspects of individual almsgiving. In the context of the charitable institutions, representations of the beggar demonstrated the belief that public charity could transform the mendicant into a productive member of society. Representations of the sentimental encounter with the begging figure offered evidence of a compassionate and benevolent nation. Only the social critique made by Collier's begging veteran gave any sign of the deteriorating relations between rich and poor that lay just below the surface of this seemingly well-ordered society.

## Chapter Two

### The beggar in the sentimental mode

#### Introduction

From around 1770 onwards, the beggar began to be represented as more obviously an object of sentiment, that is to say as a figure both vulnerable and needy, who functioned as a prompt to the viewer's sympathy. Although there is evidence that a few paintings of individual beggars had been exhibited during the 1760s, the figure now appeared more frequently as the subject of the single-figure paintings known as fancy pictures. These paintings were displayed in the London exhibition spaces to an audience of elite viewers. From the late 1770s, artists also began to produce narrative scenes depicting acts of almsgiving to the beggar, following the precedent provided by Penny (figure 1.19). These scenes proved especially popular with the public and continued to appear until the end of the century, with many being engraved as prints. In both the fancy pictures and the scenes of benevolence, the beggar subjects represent the social types of the deserving poor: the young, the old, the sick, the woman with children and the blind beggar. The aim of this chapter is to account for the success or otherwise of these paintings of lowly subjects and to explain the functions they performed for their viewers.

To fulfil this aim, I build on the existing secondary literature. I develop Martin Postle's brief account of the representation of the beggar in the fancy picture by relating such images to the discourse of sensibility.<sup>1</sup> Reading the beggar as an object of sentiment, I explore the ways in which the figure was constructed so as to meet the demands of aesthetic decorum and to maximise its sentimental appeal. Also addressed is the question of how artists sought to contain the more disturbing aspects of the begging figure that conveyed that all was not well in the social order. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, several scholars have identified a sense of disquiet at this time about the state of society; this found expression in a nostalgia for the imagined paternalism of former years when social and familial bonds were strong. The function of the beggar images in calling to mind both anxieties about the nature of society and the perceived moral values of the past will be a key issue in this chapter. However, these images were also commodities in an art market, as John Chu has emphasised in an unpublished doctoral thesis on English

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<sup>1</sup> Postle 1998.

fancy painting.<sup>2</sup> Investigating the production of beggar images as a commercial practice will shed further light on their success with the viewing public.

The first two sections of this chapter address representations of individual beggar types in the fancy picture. I begin by discussing the development of the sentimental figure of the child beggar and account for its limited popular success. I move on to investigate the transformation of the traditionally comic, and often sinful, blind beggar into a figure of pathos. The third section addresses the role of women in the narrative scenes produced in the 1780s and 1790s in which alms are given to the beggar. The chapter concludes with a case study of Sir William Beechey's painting, *Portrait of Sir Francis Ford's Children giving a Coin to a Beggar Boy* (1793), which combines the figure of the child beggar and an act of feminine benevolence. Although, as I argue, this is an exceptional painting, it nevertheless exemplifies the wider functions the sentimental figure of the beggar could perform in mediating both socio-economic and cultural change for its elite viewers.

### Section One: The child beggar in the fancy picture

The child beggar was one of the social types represented in the British eighteenth-century fancy picture. This genre was firmly established in Britain by the 1760s with 'fancy' appearing as a term of reference in both exhibition catalogues and reviews. *A fancy head, in oil* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1773 while ten years later a critic could refer to 'some *Fancy Subjects* of merit'.<sup>3</sup> Understood to be a product of 'fancy' or imagination, the fancy picture had first emerged in Britain in the 1730s; typically it adopts the format of a life-size portrait, vertical and half-, or bust-length and depicts not the specific individuals who feature in portraits but social types. Such types are characterised by their otherness to the elite viewer and embrace a broad range from the young child to such exotic figures as the gipsy fortune teller, as well as the many representatives of the poor, from servant girl to beggar. Although the portrait format gives an immediacy to these subjects, many of whom confront the viewer with a direct gaze, they remain confined within a frame, allowing the exhibition audience to safely indulge their curiosity about types from whom they were distanced in daily life.

Scholars disagree over the origins of the fancy picture: according to Postle, these are to be found in the work of Caravaggio and his successors, while Sean Shesgreen argues that

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<sup>2</sup> Chu 2015a.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Morton Paye, no. 216; *Painter's Mirror*, 26-29 April 1783: 116.

Philippe Mercier initiated the genre by crossing the tradition of the Cries with the *fête galante*.<sup>4</sup> Melissa Percival, by contrast, argues that the British fancy picture falls within a broader category of 'the imaginary half-length single figure, or fantasy figure' found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. However, she finds the British fancy picture to be more firmly grounded in everyday life, drawing its inspiration from 'the sentimentalism of Murillo and the beggars and street urchins of Ribera' rather than the more erotic and elegant Venetian and Netherlandish antecedents of the fantasy figures painted by French artists such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard.<sup>5</sup> This difference can be seen by comparing Johan Zoffany's *The Watercress Girl* (1780) with Fragonard's *Young Girl Holding Two Puppies* (c. 1770) (figures 2.1, 2.2). Zoffany's young girl is a street trader, one of the urban poor, whereas Fragonard's subject is of a higher social class. Her gaiety, together with her exposed nipple, creates an overtly erotic appeal; by contrast, the youthful innocence of the watercress girl makes her an object of sentiment, although still an alluring figure for the male viewer. Percival's characterisation of the British fancy picture is supported by the examples discussed in this chapter, all of which represent the deserving poor in the sentimental mode.

More so than in the European tradition, the individual beggar proved a popular subject for the fancy pictures produced in Britain. Exhibition catalogues from as early as 1763 list paintings that feature the beggar in their titles, although few of these works have survived. Of the paintings of individual beggars produced between the 1770s and early 1800s that can be traced today, two depict old men, seven show child beggars and four, blind adult males.<sup>6</sup> Although there are references to paintings depicting beggar women, none appears to have survived.<sup>7</sup> The evidence of these fancy pictures of beggars would appear to contradict John Barrell's argument that the poor had to be shown working; however, the beggars depicted come in the category of the impotent poor who were regarded as incapable of work and so represent the exception that proves the rule.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, their

<sup>4</sup> Postle 1998: 9; Shesgreen 2002: 86.

<sup>5</sup> Percival 2012: 50, 71-72. A wider range of fantasy paintings is covered in the exhibition catalogue, *Figures de Fantaisie du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. (Percival and Hémery: 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Kitchingman's illustration is omitted since it is in the comic rather than the sentimental mode. Of the two paintings of old men, that by Nathaniel Dance represents a known beggar rather than a social type and is discussed in Chapter 5. Hugh Robinson's *Head of a Beggar*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782, was damaged by fire and repainted (Paul Mellon Centre Photographic Archive). Of the paintings of child beggars, five are addressed in this chapter; *The Beggar Boy* by John Sell Cotman (1808) is considered in Chapter 5, and *Two Children Begging; in small* by George Carter (1774: BM 1902,1011.5081) is an early work exhibited at the Society of Artists, not discussed here.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in 1785 R Taylor exhibited *A beggar-woman* at the Royal Academy (no. 526).

<sup>8</sup> Barrell 1980: 13.

weakness contributes to their vulnerability that made so strong an appeal to the sentiments of the viewer.

Fancy pictures featuring the child beggar had appeared in exhibition listings since the late 1760s.<sup>9</sup> A notable addition to their number was a painting exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1775 by Sir Joshua Reynolds, under the title *A beggar boy and his sister* (figure 2.3). The choice of subject matter was unexpected for the President of a Royal Academy which aimed to promote history painting and who had himself criticised the 'vulgar and mean subjects' of Dutch and Flemish art.<sup>10</sup> Percival, however, has suggested that Reynolds in his fancy pictures was indulging a 'guilty pleasure' as a respite from his role as President.<sup>11</sup> The artist may also have seen a commercial opportunity, responding to the popularity among aristocratic collectors of paintings of beggar boys by the seventeenth-century Spanish artist, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo.<sup>12</sup> Xanthe Brooke has commented on the 'constant trickle' of genre paintings, 'mainly of beggar children, purporting to be by or after Murillo', that appeared on the London market in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>13</sup> Some of Murillo's paintings of beggar boys were engraved, although the mezzotint, *The Spanish Beggar Boy* (1769), which claims to be after Murillo, has none of the energy of his urchins.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Murillo's popularity with eighteenth-century collectors supports Percival's argument for the artist as an important inspiration for the British fancy picture; certainly, Reynolds was one of those who drew on the Spanish artist's work.<sup>15</sup>

Reynolds' debt to Murillo can be seen clearly in *A beggar boy and his sister*. The painting is an almost life-size composition in which a boy, shown half-length and holding a cabbage net, looks directly at the viewer while his younger sister stands behind him in the shadows. The cabbage net identifies the boy as a beggar since selling these nets was, as Tim Hitchcock has noted, one of 'the pauper professions'.<sup>16</sup> A comparison can be made with Murillo's *Boys Playing Dice* in which a young boy also stares soulfully at the viewer (figure 2.4). There are, however, significant differences between the two works: Murillo's

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<sup>9</sup> According to Shesgreen, 'prints and paintings romanticizing [...] street urchins and infant beggars' were 'a favourite subject at the yearly exhibitions of the Society of Artists'. (Shesgreen 2002: 86) Only four titles definitely suggest this type of figure, however. Shesgreen refers to Postle here, but the latter only argues more generally for the fancy picture as 'a favoured art form' at these exhibitions during the 1760s. (Postle 1998: 6)

<sup>10</sup> Reynolds 1975: 109.

<sup>11</sup> 'Plaisir coupable': Percival and Hémerly 2015: 34.

<sup>12</sup> The cleric, Matthew Pilkington, observed that Murillo's beggar boys 'are much esteemed, many of them being admitted into the most capital collections of the English nobility'. (Pilkington 1770: 411)

<sup>13</sup> Brooke 2001: 62.

<sup>14</sup> BM 1911,0717.1.

<sup>15</sup> Brooke 2001: 63; Postle 1995: 60.

<sup>16</sup> Hitchcock 2004a: 49.

child is part of a lively group, seen here at play, with dirty feet, broken shoes and ragged clothes. By contrast, Reynolds' beggar boy is a more solitary, passive figure who was reportedly based on a real individual. From the evidence of William Mason, who is said to have been a frequent visitor to Reynolds' studio in the mid-1770s, Postle identifies the model for the beggar boy as an orphan aged about fourteen, who, with his siblings, made and sold cabbage nets to support themselves.<sup>17</sup> By taking a beggar boy into his studio, Reynolds shows a concern for authenticity in contrast to the academic focus on the ideal. However, unlike Murillo, Reynolds shows the boy with clean hair and skin, dressed in a neat smock, so as not to offend the elite viewer. Nevertheless, Reynolds' reference to an admired Old Master here validates his representation of a low-life subject.

The most striking contrast between these paintings by Murillo and Reynolds is the latter's inclusion of the beggar boy's sister. Seen together, the presence of these two children raises important issues concerning the nature of childhood as it was understood at the time. Scholars have noted how the idea of the innocent child gained credence in the eighteenth century: such innocence, however, rendered the child a vulnerable figure and the poor child especially so.<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Mitchell, writing about the later part of the century, has argued that representations of childhood innocence inevitably evoked anxieties about the ever-present threat of corruption that exposure to the world would bring.<sup>19</sup> To such anxieties was added, as Emma Barker has noted, the middle-class fear of the consequences for the child of a parent's death, especially that of the father.<sup>20</sup> Such vulnerability was central to the child's sentimental appeal; so too, as Mitchell further argues, was the growing belief that all children, regardless of rank, had the right to a childhood free from the responsibility of having to work for a living.<sup>21</sup> However, viewing the fancy pictures of vulnerable young children can place the spectator in an uncomfortable position. She/he is called on to respond with sympathy as the child's protector yet, as part of the adult world, is potentially one who could exploit the young child's innocence. Young girls in particular faced the threat of sexual exploitation: the association of the female beggar with prostitution was strong. Faced with the image of a vulnerable child, the viewer has the choice as to whether to respond as protector or predator.

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<sup>17</sup> Postle 1995: 95.

<sup>18</sup> Steward 1995; Mitchell 2001; Barker 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell 2001: 115.

<sup>20</sup> Barker 2009: 436.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell 2001: 117.



The themes of innocence and experience are made explicit in *A beggar boy and his sister*. The boy's childhood has already been lost to the need to work for a living. More disturbing, however, is the figure of his sister, shown here hiding behind her brother who stands defensively between her and the viewer as if to protect her from the attentions of the outside world. The boy's direct gaze has the dual function, noted by Mitchell, of appealing for sympathy and at the same time implicating the viewer as the source of corrupting experience. The threatened loss of innocence is emphasised by Reynolds' use of chiaroscuro, placing the girl in dark shadow while her brother is irradiated as her protector. Furthermore, the artist also employs symbolism: behind the girl's right shoulder is what appears to be a tree with lopped branches as if to represent a childhood destroyed before its time (figure 2.5). To associate the girl with the loss of female innocence, however, would work against the painting's sentimental appeal, which could explain why Reynolds' original title was changed to *The Boy with Cabbage Nets* when the painting was engraved in 1803, thus removing any reference to the young girl. Nevertheless, it remains a disturbing image, invoking both the innocence of childhood and its loss.<sup>22</sup>

The evidence would suggest that Reynolds' choice of subject in this painting was determined as much by aesthetic as by moral concerns. His allusion to Murillo was not his only reference to the Old Masters: his use of chiaroscuro and warm colouring reveal a debt to Rembrandt, several of whose works Reynolds owned. In his *Discourse* of 1778, he commented on Rembrandt's 'absolute unity; he often has but one group, and exhibits little more than one spot of light in the midst of a large quantity of shadow'. Although he goes on to criticise this as an 'ostentation of art, with regard to light and shadow', he himself uses such ostentation to great effect in *A beggar boy*.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the two surviving reviews of the painting make clear that it was viewed more as an exercise in the style of Rembrandt than as an image of childhood poverty. The *London Evening Post* found the picture 'remarkable for its colouring and relieve', while Horace Walpole noted in a brief annotation to his catalogue, 'Strongly coloured; one of his very best works'.<sup>24</sup> Reynolds' reference to Rembrandt played to the popularity of the Dutch artist: Timothy Clayton has noted 'the Rembrandt craze' from 1740, observing that 'enthusiasm for Rembrandt's prints reached a fever pitch in 1757'.<sup>25</sup> However, the Dutch artist's work remained problematic: the introduction to a catalogue of his works both derided his 'perverted and irremediable taste'

<sup>22</sup> A dead tree features prominently in George Carter's earlier *Two Children Begging*. (see fn. 6)

<sup>23</sup> Reynolds 1975: 147, 148.

<sup>24</sup> *London Evening Post*, 4-6 May 1775; Graves and Cronin 1899-1901: iv, 1447.

<sup>25</sup> Clayton 1995: 13.

while recognising him as 'a man of genius'.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, by his reference to Rembrandt in his handling of paint, Reynolds lays claim to his own genius, adding prestige to his low subject.

Reynolds' reference to the Old Masters would have increased the market value of his work. Chu has argued that such allusions made Reynolds' fancy pictures desirable acquisitions for aristocratic collectors who already owned works by artists such as Murillo and Rembrandt.<sup>27</sup> *A beggar boy and his sister* was sold to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Dorset for the high price of fifty guineas, to join the other fancy pictures of children by Reynolds that he already owned. Writing about the Duke's collection, Chu has argued that it 'signalled a particular and private taste'.<sup>28</sup> The fancy pictures in the collection show that Dorset's taste embraced both the overtly erotic and the sentimental; certainly, the sexual allusions in both *Cupid as a Link Boy* and *Mercury as a Cutpurse* are undisguised while *Lesbia* shows a young girl in a provocative attitude (figure 2.6). The mood of *A beggar boy and his sister*, by contrast, although it may suggest the child as a potential sexual object, is one of pathos. It would seem unlikely that the Duke viewed these paintings as scenes of touching innocence, not least because child poverty would have been remote from his experience. For him they would have remained no more than imagined constructions. Further evidence of this aristocratic attitude to the poor can be found elsewhere in his collection: Thomas Gainsborough's *Elizabeth and Thomas Linley*, also known as *Beggar Boy and Girl* (c. 1768) depicts two children of the Linley family dressed as child beggars (figure 2.7). Shown as refined figures, they represent a pastoral innocence rather than a social problem. Although Reynolds' *Beggar Boy* appealed to the connoisseur, there is no evidence of its popular appeal: no print would be made for another thirty years. Such an image may well have been too uncomfortable for the print-buying public for whom the child mendicant would have been a more familiar figure.

Reynolds' treatment of the child beggar contrasts with that of the young artist John Opie, who made his debut at the Royal Academy in 1782. Among the works that Opie exhibited was *A beggar*, which is likely to be the work now known as *A Boy Seeking Alms* (figure 2.8). Using the format of a half-length portrait, almost life-size, the painting depicts a seated beggar boy, his upturned hat held out for alms. Opie has mitigated the threat of corruption that imbued Reynolds' image by emphasising the child's innocence: his subject

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<sup>26</sup> Daulby 1796: xiii, i.

<sup>27</sup> Chu 2015b: 94.

<sup>28</sup> Chu 2016.

is younger, with bow lips and a carefully positioned curl. Instead of being situated in an urban context, this boy is shown in an autumnal, rural landscape which suggests the virtues associated with country life as opposed to the corruption of the city. The trees are in leaf, not lopped as in Reynolds' image, nor is there any troubling presence of a female child to disturb the scene. Both artists have employed the direct gaze; however, in Opie's image the viewer is invited to return the gaze as the child's protector. The shadow falling over the boy's left side can then be interpreted as that of the adult spectator as an imagined benefactor, rather than as a threatening presence.

A contrast can be made not only between the two paintings but also between the artists themselves. Opie had been taken up in his native Cornwall by John Walcot who promoted the young artist on his arrival in London as a self-taught genius. The success of his strategy is demonstrated by the reception of Opie's paintings that depicted such rustic subjects as beggars and country children. According to one critic, the artist was 'inspired, rather than taught' while Walpole referred to him as 'a new genius, one Opy, a Cornish lad of nineteen, who has taught himself to colour in a strong, bold, masterly style by studying nature, and painting from beggars and poor children'.<sup>29</sup> Such a characterisation of the artist suggests an authenticity in his representations of the poor not to be found in the work of an academically-trained artist such as Reynolds: in the *Painter's Mirror* of 1783, Opie is seen to prefer 'nature in a very homely state, to academical grace'.<sup>30</sup> This setting of the 'natural' against the academic sophistication of Reynolds' fancy pictures perhaps prompted the critic for *St. James's Chronicle* to suggest, 'We hope Sir Joshua Reynolds will take some Lessons from this young Man before he leaves London'.<sup>31</sup> The young artist had clearly caught the attention of the art world.

Contemporaries even went so far as to refer to Opie as 'the English Rembrandt'.<sup>32</sup> They were impressed by his colouring and use of chiaroscuro, both features that were admired in the Dutch artist's work: the one surviving review of *A beggar* praises the artist's 'Truth and Force of Colouring'.<sup>33</sup> Reynolds himself had recognised Opie's skill in these areas despite his lack of academic training. Being shown some of Opie's work, Reynolds had been astonished, saying it displayed 'excellencies that would not disgrace the pencil of Caravaggio. Opie's knowledge of chiaro scuro without having ever seen a picture of the

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<sup>29</sup> *London Chronicle*, 27 April 1782; Rogers 1878: 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Royal Academy Critiques*: I, 1768-1793.

<sup>31</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 9-11 May 1782: 4.

<sup>32</sup> Seifert 2018: 40.

<sup>33</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 9-11 May 1782: 4.

dark masters, drew from his eye a sort of wonder'.<sup>34</sup> However, Opie was not only a follower of the 'dark masters' in his use of chiaroscuro: both Rembrandt and Caravaggio were artists whose genius was seen to lie in their defiance of academic rules. Opie was also their heir in this respect: his claim to genius was founded on his position as an outsider to the academic establishment. As the work of an outsider and one eschewing 'academical grace', his representation of the beggar boy was thus seen as more convincing than that of Reynolds.

The appeal the child beggar held for the aristocratic collector, as evidenced by the Duke of Dorset's collection, is further supported by the history of Opie's painting. The work was bought by the Earl of Sutherland and does not appear to have been engraved for the print market. A similar lack of popular success attended the one fancy picture of child beggars by Gainsborough. His *Beggar Boys* remained unsold at the artist's death in 1788 and was not reproduced until 1889: it was eventually bought by the Duke of Newcastle for his collection at Clumber Park in a posthumous studio sale (figure 2.9).<sup>35</sup> Like Reynolds and Opie, Gainsborough makes reference to the Old Masters, so increasing the painting's appeal to the connoisseur. His debt is to Murillo and here more specifically to the artist's *Child Christ as the Good Shepherd* that he had copied earlier.<sup>36</sup> Tijana Žakula has argued that 'a certain nobility' in the idealised features of all the poor children in Gainsborough's fancy pictures would have made them more appealing to connoisseurs.<sup>37</sup> The eventual sale of *Beggar Boys* supports her argument.

*Beggar Boys* exemplifies the sentimental appeal of the poor child in the artist's rustic fancy pictures. It is an almost life-size, half-length portrait of two young boys in the countryside, one clasping a pitcher and looking down while his companion, who carries a bundle on his back, gazes upwards. Like Reynolds, Gainsborough used a child beggar, Jack Hill, as a model: however, there is little to indicate that the two young boys are beggars.<sup>38</sup> Their features are indeed idealised and their clothes neither ragged nor torn: the refinement of the figures is not dissimilar to that of the artist's portrait of the Linley children as child beggars. Moreover, the boys' expressions display the 'certain nobility' that serves to emphasise their innocence and vulnerability: the pathos of these figures, as of all

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<sup>34</sup> Rogers 1878: 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> William Watts noted the 'exceeding fine Collection of Paintings, many of which are by the first Masters' at Clumber Park. (Watts 1779(-1786))

<sup>36</sup> Ellis Waterhouse makes a connection between the Murillo and Gainsborough's *A Shepherd*; there are marked similarities in the features of the shepherd boy and the subjects of the later *Beggar Boys*. (Waterhouse 1946: 137)

<sup>37</sup> Žakula 2011: 172.

<sup>38</sup> Waterhouse 1946: 138.

Gainsborough's representations of poor children, is extreme. Although shown in rural settings rather than in a more threatening urban environment, these children are often isolated figures, engaged in some form of labour. The young girl in *Girl and Pigs* (1782), for example, shows none of the gaiety of childhood innocence; rather her melancholy expression suggests a childhood lost to poverty and the need to work (figure 2.10). There is no sense, as there had been with Opie, that charity is forthcoming.

Significantly, the reception of these images makes clear that such pathos was now recognised. Discussing the fancy pictures of Reynolds and Gainsborough, Patricia Crown argues that the focus on technique, noted in the reviews of both Reynolds' and Opie's child beggars, demonstrates that critics had found difficulty in finding 'the language for this new visual and sentimental experience'.<sup>39</sup> By 1786, however, such difficulties had been resolved: reviewing that year's Royal Academy exhibition, a critic regretted Gainsborough's absence and with it, 'those little simple subjects' of shepherd boys and cottage girls, that 'awakened in the heart the most pathetic sensations'.<sup>40</sup> Some of these simple subjects clearly had a popular appeal: the print of *Girl and Pigs*, for example, appeared the year after the painting was exhibited. If *Beggar Boys* did not meet with similar success, it may be that, identified as mendicants and with no employment to support them, the evident need of these two children created a deeper unease in the middle-class viewer. For, as with the child beggars of Reynolds and Opie, it was primarily to the aristocratic collector that this painting made its appeal.

To conclude, the fancy picture in Britain provided the stage for representations of low-class subjects which included the beggar; at the same time, the opening of London exhibition spaces in the years following 1760 placed this figure on public display. In their depictions of the child beggar, Reynolds, Opie and Gainsborough drew on contemporary ideas about childhood innocence to create the paintings' sentimental appeal. However, these paintings also suggest that poverty and sexual exploitation threatened such innocence, making them disturbing images for the middle-class viewer. Their appeal appears to have been limited to aristocratic collectors; for them, the child beggar, as one remote from their experience, remained primarily an aesthetic object.

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<sup>39</sup> Crown 1984: 162.

<sup>40</sup> *Morning Herald*, 2 May 1786.

## Section Two: The blind beggar

Whereas paintings of the single figure of the child beggar were an innovation in British art, the iconography of the figure type of the blind beggar had a long history. Scholars have traced the motif of the blind man and his guide back to the fourteenth century in Europe; the figure could appear as one of the sacred poor but was more often represented as a comic or sinful character.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1709, an English edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* gives as the emblem for Error a blindfold pilgrim having to feel his way without inner spiritual guidance.<sup>42</sup> However, the more familiar visual representation of the blind male beggar in Britain in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was the stock figure used to illustrate broadside ballads and chapbooks (figure 2.11). With his staff and often a dog to guide him, the figure was instantly recognisable but depended on an accompanying text to identify him as either one of the deserving poor or as an idle rogue, feigning blindness. This section will address the development of the figure of the blind beggar into an object of sentiment within the domain of fine art.

If the blind beggar were to function as a prompt to sympathy, any moral ambiguity surrounding the figure had to be removed. One solution was for artists to represent historical or literary characters of former high status who had been reduced to the position of a blind beggar by tragic misfortune. One such was the Byzantine general, Belisarius, whose story became widely known with the publication in 1767 of an English translation of Jean-François Marmontel's novel, *Belisarius*. A military hero of the sixth century A.D., Belisarius became the victim of jealous intrigue: falsely accused by the Emperor Justinian, he was said to have been blinded and left to beg on the streets in his old age. Martin Myrone has argued that the story acquired political significance in the 1770s because its critique of state corruption resonated with contemporary anxieties about the corrupt state of the British administration.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as a former military hero, now rejected by society, the blind Belisarius represented an unambiguous object of sympathy. His popularity is demonstrated by his frequent representation in paintings exhibited from the 1760s through to the following century.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Karen Hellerstedt has identified the motif in a mid-fourteenth-century English manuscript; both she and Tom Nichols have written about its presence in Netherlandish art of the sixteenth century. (Hellerstedt 1983; Nichols 2007a)

<sup>42</sup> Ripa 1709: 27.

<sup>43</sup> Myrone 2005: 122; Myrone 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Over a dozen paintings of Belisarius are listed in exhibition catalogues between 1767 and 1815.

Although very few of these paintings have survived, those that offer a sentimental treatment of the subject form a contrast to earlier representations of the figure. A painting of Belisarius by Salvator Rosa, for example, reproduced as a print in 1757, depicts the former general as a martial figure, still wearing the remnants of his armour and watched by three Roman soldiers (figure 2.12). However, in 1787, the portrait painter, John Hoppner, exhibited a work entitled *Belisarius* in which he chose rather to emphasise the pathos of the figure (figure 2.13). Belisarius is depicted as a blind old man, half-length, isolated against a dark background with the light falling on his bowed head; his white hair and beard accord him the dignity of age.<sup>45</sup> Although he appears to be cradling a scimitar, he no longer wears armour and can be identified only from the painting's title. As noted in the previous chapter, the figure of the begging veteran made a strong appeal for sympathy; to this was added here the moving spectacle of misfortune met with fortitude. However, Belisarius' function as a figure of social critique was also recognised: Hoppner's subject was seen as a 'needy warrior' by one critic, an oxymoron that both drew attention to the injustice of the situation and clearly marked the figure as an object of sentiment.<sup>46</sup>

The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green was another character whose story provided the context for the figure to be represented as deserving of sympathy. The tale first appeared as a ballad in the time of Elizabeth I and was adapted as a prose story that was published in chapbook form some time before 1700. It tells of a thirteenth-century nobleman, Monford, who, having lost his sight while fighting in France, is reduced to begging on his return to England. A young knight seeks the hand of his daughter, Bessy, but this match with a beggar's child is opposed by his uncle. Challenged by Bessy's father to a contest dropping gold coins, the uncle is defeated whereupon the blind beggar reveals himself to be a nobleman by birth, so removing all obstacles to his daughter's marriage. Although early versions of the text were illustrated, the blind beggar was represented by the traditional stock figure; variations of this image continued to be used in chapbook editions throughout the eighteenth century (figure 2.14).

The transformation of the Bethnal Green beggar into an object of sentiment began in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1766, Thomas Percy included *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* in his collection, *Reliques of ancient English poetry*. In his introduction to the

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<sup>45</sup> The type of the old man had been a popular subject for Reynolds in the 1770s when Postle notes 'the vogue for patriarchal old men'. (Postle 1995: 134)

<sup>46</sup> *Morning Herald*, 11 May 1787: 2. Other extant representations of Belisarius as a sentimental subject include an elaborate drawing by Joseph Wright of Derby, *Belisarius Receiving Alms* (1775: Derby Museum and Art Gallery) and an illustration for a popular ballad, *Bellisarius [sic]* (1792: BM 2010,7081.836).

ballad, however, Percy quoted a fragment in a very different style, allegedly taken from a version that had been brought to his attention. The fragment describes the blind beggar:

down his necke  
his reverend lockes  
In comelye curles did wave;  
And on his aged temples grewe  
The blossomes of the grave.<sup>47</sup>

Percy found these lines 'truly beautiful' in their appeal to the sentiments. Their pathos lies both in the dignity of a figure who is now helpless but whose 'reverend lockes' can still command respect, and in the final poignant metaphor where the white 'blossomes' of his hair promise not new life but death. That these lines resonated with contemporary readers is evident from a review in *The Gentleman's Magazine* which commented, 'there is not one thought in all the old songs contained in these three volumes equally poetical with that expressed in the last two verses [*sic*] of the fragment'.<sup>48</sup> As a former nobleman, blinded while fighting for his country, this blind beggar is seen as unequivocally deserving of sympathy. Furthermore, the inclusion of the Bethnal Green ballad in a volume of '*ancient English poetry*' suggests its nostalgic appeal in referencing the traditional values of the past when a young girl could be won by a suitor unconcerned with material gain.

The visual representation of the Bethnal Green beggar as an object of sentiment was slower to develop but its beginnings can be traced to the title-page of a 1741 edition of a dramatised version of the tale, *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, by Robert Dodsley (figure 2.15). The formulaic figure of the blind beggar has here been replaced by one who is recognisably a human being and can engage the viewer's emotions: an old blind man, he now faces the viewer with his unseeing gaze, his hat outstretched in an appeal for charity. Performed at Drury Lane in 1741 and published the same year, Dodsley's play is a short piece with songs that focusses on Bessy and her suitors and ends with her father's dramatic revelation of his noble birth.<sup>49</sup> Although the play was not a success, the published version continued in print until at least 1777.<sup>50</sup> At a cost of one shilling, it would have appealed to a more elite audience than that of the inexpensive chapbook editions.<sup>51</sup> Aware of the blind

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<sup>47</sup> Percy 1766: II, 119ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1765: 181.

<sup>49</sup> The performance is dated 1741 by John Egerton. (Egerton 1788: 171)

<sup>50</sup> 'The *Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* is an unhappy subject. It did not succeed.' (Dibdin 1800: V, 167)

<sup>51</sup> It remained cheaper than a novel which cost in the region of three shillings a volume by 1775. (Brewer 1997: 178)



beggar's backstory, such an audience could respond with sympathy to the figure represented on the title-page.

What is new in the text of Dodsley's play is its emphasis on Bessy's role as the dutiful daughter which serves to increase the story's sentimental appeal. The conflict between her love for her suitor and her reluctance to leave her aged father is evident in her impassioned plea to the man she eventually marries. 'Think on my father', she begs. 'Can I leave him, blind and helpless, to struggle with Infirmary and Want, when it is in my Power to make his old Age comfortable and happy?'<sup>52</sup> The type of the dutiful daughter is found in later sentimental fiction; in James Thistlethwaite's *The Man of Experience* (1778), for example, the narrator hears the sad tale of Emily which reveals the strong bond between father and daughter. For her father, she possesses 'the perfections and the excellencies of a virtuous and dutiful daughter'; when she and her father are confined to prison by the machinations of the man who attempted to seduce her, it is only of her father that Emily thinks, and her subsequent death is a highly charged scene.<sup>53</sup> Susan Staves has argued that 'the death of an idealized older form of the family' is lamented in eighteenth-century sentimental fiction.<sup>54</sup> In Dodsley's play, the strong familial bonds that would lead a beautiful young girl to consider renouncing her sexual power to care for her aged father are held up as a nostalgic reference to an older moral order, set against the weakened family ties of the present.

The figure of Bessy as the dutiful daughter would find early visual representation in a fancy picture by Opie, *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green and his daughter*, which depicts the aged, blind beggar with the young girl (figure 2.16). Opie produced at least four versions of the painting; although none is dated, they were undoubtedly produced after 1782 when Opie made his debut in London.<sup>55</sup> In the version in the Ashmolean Museum, the blind beggar is depicted as a figure of pathos: he is a stooped, old man whose grey hair gives him an air of dignity and whose suffering is emphasised by the dramatically darkened areas surrounding blind eyes that cannot return the viewer's gaze. He leans on a staff, resting his left hand trustingly on the shoulder of his daughter, who is dressed in a red cloak with a bonnet and kerchief. In her right hand is a bundle of the matches she sells to support herself and her father. Both figures are bust-length and the light falls on the face of the suffering father and his young daughter. Whereas Opie's solitary child beggar had been a disturbing presence, the evidence that this old man is being cared for mitigates any

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<sup>52</sup> Dodsley 1741: 9.

<sup>53</sup> Thistlethwaite 1778: II, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Staves 1980-81: 134.

<sup>55</sup> Rogers 1878.

disquiet felt by the viewer at the blind man's plight. Nor does his daughter make a direct appeal to the viewer but averts her gaze, so emphasising her modesty. She epitomises the qualities that Staves has argued 'the culture especially prized in young women: beauty, simplicity [...], trustfulness, and affectionateness.'<sup>56</sup> Her virtue, however, only serves to increase her erotic appeal to the male viewer. Although no reviews for this fancy picture in any of its versions survive, the several variations produced by Opie suggest it was a popular subject.

In a later representation of the subject, William Owen increased the eroticism of the beggar's daughter but in so doing, reduced her sentimental appeal. A pupil of Opie, Owen produced some rural scenes, but the bulk of his work was portraiture. *The beggar's daughter of Bednall-green* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1801 and subsequently engraved as a print (figure 2.17). Here, in a country landscape, the blind beggar is depicted seated outside a cottage seeking alms, with his daughter standing beside him. Owen had added to the pathos of the figure by including in the catalogue entry the verse fragment quoted by Percy. However, he represents the beggar's daughter as an overtly sexual figure with her low-cut dress and hat set at a jaunty angle: her direct gaze is less an innocent plea and more a provocative challenge. One critic reviewing the painting recognised that her obvious consciousness of her sexual power reduced her sentimental appeal; he found the figure of Bessy to be lacking 'innocence and simplicity', instead displaying a '*meretricious fortitude*', unfitting for a sentimental heroine.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the painting was popular, as evidenced by at least two separate prints being made. Viewed in a more private setting, the print's eroticism could be freely enjoyed by the male spectator.<sup>58</sup>

The back stories of both Belisarius and the Bethnal Green beggar had served to validate the blind beggar as an object of sympathy. However, in a further development, the figure would make his sentimental appeal based simply on the common humanity the viewer recognised in the blind man. This is true of the fancy picture by John Russell, *The Blind Beggar and his Grand-Daughter* (figure 2.18). Although the subjects are types, the literary figures of Belisarius and the Bethnal Green beggar had provided the precedent for reading the aged, blind man as a noble figure; moreover, the presence of the blind man and the young girl specifically recalls the sentimentalised characters of the ballad. Russell exhibited annually at the Royal Academy from 1769 until his death in 1806; his painting is

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<sup>56</sup> Staves 1980-81: 118.

<sup>57</sup> *Royal Academy Critiques*: II, 1801.

<sup>58</sup> Henry William Bunbury similarly depicted Bessy as a more sophisticated figure in a drawing of 1789. (BM 1900,0717.61)

undated but since he chiefly worked in pastel after 1770, it is probably an early work and may even predate that of Opie. It is a half-length portrait which resembles Opie's fancy picture in its depiction of the old blind beggar and the young girl in her red cloak and bonnet, as well as in the plain blue backdrop. Russell, however, increases the pathos of the beggar who is here more bowed, with his hands clasped in a gesture of supplication. His granddaughter places her arm protectively around him, emphasising his dependence and frailty. The sentimental appeal is strengthened by the presence of this young girl who gazes directly at the viewer, inviting a response. Given that, as scholars have argued, male readers and viewers were titillated by the image of the virtuous female in distress, Russell's innocent but vulnerable young woman would have served to prompt more than sympathy in the male viewer.<sup>59</sup> However, although the figure of the granddaughter, beautiful but unattainable, increases the painting's appeal to the male spectator, her gesture also invites the viewer, whether male or female, to recognise the humanity of this old man.

These artists had sought to make the blind beggar an object of sentiment whether by the evidence of his former status, by an emphasis on the dignity conferred by age or by the presence of a dutiful daughter. Such strategies served to contain the disturbing associations that came with the figure: without them, however, the blind beggar could appear a problematic, even discomfiting, figure. This is supported by the almost complete absence of any surviving paintings or prints that represent a solitary blind beggar. The only approximation to the subject is Thomas Barker's small fancy picture, *The Blind Beggar*, painted around 1788 (figure 2.19). Barker was a successful painter of rustic subjects who, like Opie, had initially been hailed as a prodigy. His painting shows a seated adult male who can be identified as blind by his staff and the presence of a young guide who appears, however, too small to represent an obvious means of support; the hat held out for alms makes clear that the man is a beggar. Although he presents no challenge insofar as he cannot return the viewer's gaze, he is nevertheless a somewhat strange figure. The tiny child guide makes the beggar appear a monumental presence but without such signifiers as poverty or age that would establish his sentimental appeal. As a blind beggar he is a vulnerable figure, yet this is not emphasised in Barker's painting which appears to be a highly unusual image for its time.

Artists had not only to make the blind beggar a sympathetic figure; they also had to mitigate the unease that the plight of the deserving beggar aroused. The support of a dutiful daughter could serve this function, but a painting exhibited by William Redmore Bigg in

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Barker-Benfield 1992: 344-345.

1780, *School-boys giving charity to a blind man*, offered a different solution (figure 2.20). A pupil of Penny, Bigg was to become known for his sentimental scenes which he continued to exhibit almost every year until his death in 1828. In this painting, three well-to-do young schoolboys give alms to a seated blind beggar whose age and subservient position clearly identify him as one of the deserving poor.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the boys' demonstration of charity serves to reassure the viewer of society's support for the unfortunate, so alleviating any residual unease. The beggar no longer makes his appeal directly to the viewer but to the children, who respond to him not as one of former status but as a fellow human; in so doing, they prompt the viewer to follow their lead. The popularity of Bigg's image of the blind beggar, here an object of sentiment but no longer a disturbing presence, is evidenced by the print made of the individual figure shortly after the painting was exhibited (figure 2.21). In Bigg's painting, the blind beggar is fully realised as a figure of pure pathos, represented in the sentimental mode.

The eighteenth century saw the formulaic image of the blind beggar develop into an object of sentiment in the medium of paint. To achieve this end, artists addressed the problematic nature of the figure in various ways. To validate the beggar's claim to sympathy they made reference to back stories that confirmed the figure's former status; however, as sentimentalism developed, artists were able to dispense with such support and rely on the viewer's recognition of his or her shared humanity with the suffering figure. By emphasising the beggar's age or including the presence of a supportive daughter, artists could increase the paintings' sentimental appeal. However, in his representation of a scene of charity to the blind beggar, Bigg found a way of containing the unease that accompanied the figure, so creating an image of the blind beggar in the sentimental mode that found popular success.

### Section Three: The beggar and the benevolent woman

The single figure paintings of both the child and the blind beggar had proved problematic because of their suggestion that all was not well in a society that condoned such suffering. Bigg, however, had addressed and successfully contained such unease in his scene of almsgiving in which the beggar now participated in an act of social exchange. Similar

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<sup>60</sup> The inscription on the board he holds increases his appeal for sympathy. Although not fully legible in the print, it appears to include the words, 'A poor old man who has been blind upwards of 41 years'.

narrative scenes of benevolence became popular in the 1780s and 1790s; many were exhibited at the Royal Academy and most were engraved as prints. The beggars in these scenes are the familiar representatives of the deserving poor: namely the blind man and the young child, the elderly and the woman with children. The almsgivers are social types who represent their class, whether gentry or rural cottagers: however, almost without exception, all are women.<sup>61</sup> The following section addresses the role of women as the principal almsgivers in these scenes and considers the beggar's function in these demonstrations of ideal womanhood.

The common theme in these paintings is the benevolence seen to characterise a moral community. The rise of a commercial society was feared by many to threaten the traditional ties of obligation between rich and poor: to counter such anxieties, it was widely held that the British were a benevolent people.<sup>62</sup> This belief was reiterated in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*: writing in 1780, one correspondent asserts that 'the benevolence of this nation is great beyond comparison', while another had earlier referred to 'this charitable and benevolent age'.<sup>63</sup> Visual images of benevolence to the deserving poor could offer reassurance to the elite viewer that present-day Britain was indeed a moral nation. Such was the function performed by George Morland's early sentimental scene, *Compassion*, engraved as a print in 1779 (figure 2.22). Morland was a prolific and popular painter; although best known for his rustic genre pictures, his work covered a wide range from landscapes to literary subjects. *Compassion* depicts a woodland landscape where two well-dressed ladies have come upon an old, blind man and his young companion, who holds out a hat as one of the ladies searches in her pocket for alms. The female almsgiver, here one of the elite, demonstrates the social virtue of benevolence; the recipient is a beggar who, as both aged and blind, is the type of the touching figure seen in the previous section and clearly deserving of her charity. However, the abstract title elevates the scene from the realm of the particular to the emblematic: the woman becomes here the embodiment of compassion and the beggar, the embodiment of suffering humanity; together they represent a benevolent society.

The beggar has a necessary role in such narrative scenes but their presence points to the paradox that underlies them. Displays of sympathy and benevolence depend on the presence of a suffering other: as William Blake was to write at the end of the century, 'Pity

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<sup>61</sup> A notable exception is George Morland's *The Benevolent Sportsman*, discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>62</sup> Langford 1989: 481.

<sup>63</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1780: 25; December 1777: 568.

would be no more / If we did not make somebody Poor'.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, as Lynn Festa has argued in her study of sentimental figures in the context of empire, 'sympathetic identification creates difference rather than similitude'.<sup>65</sup> Despite the momentary experience of shared humanity, social distance is maintained between beggar and almsgiver in Morland's painting; the beggar functions not only as the necessary prompt to charity but also to define one extreme of the social hierarchy that is represented here. Read thus, such imagined scenes become the stage on which the elite legitimate their dominance of society by displaying their social virtues, without having to engage actively with the problem of the poor.<sup>66</sup>

Women are represented as the principal almsgivers in the narrative scenes because sensibility and benevolence were considered essentially feminine attributes. Writing about sentimental fiction, Gillian Skinner argues that 'charitable impulses and benevolence, the feeling heart and the speaking body' were considered 'the proper attributes of the sensible female'.<sup>67</sup> Contemporary conduct books for women prescribe 'the great duty of almsgiving', although always emphasising the need for discrimination; perceived as over-emotional, women were thought to be in danger of allowing their feelings to overrule their reason in deciding who was deserving of their charity.<sup>68</sup> The association between women and benevolence was strengthened in the second half of the eighteenth century when women took an increasingly active role in setting up and managing charitable institutions such as visiting societies.<sup>69</sup> They also subscribed to public charities: over seventy women are listed as subscribers to the London Hospital in 1777, for example. In representing the elite woman practising charity, images such as *Compassion* made their appeal to the middle-class viewer for whom charitable endeavour was increasingly being seen as a feminine activity.

As important as the gender of the almsgiver is her social status, as is evident in a painting by Bigg, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1781. *A Lady and Children Relieving a Cottager* depicts a fashionably-dressed lady, accompanied by her two children and a black servant, stopping at a cottage to give alms to a seated woman with a baby on her lap (figure 2.23). Beth Fowkes Tobin has suggested that the seated woman is a displaced

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<sup>64</sup> From 'The Human Abstract', lines 1-2, in *Songs of Experience*. (Keynes 1969: 217)

<sup>65</sup> Festa 2006: 4.

<sup>66</sup> Festa has argued that similar scenes of 'passive suffering and kindly paternalistic redemption' in the sentimental novel 'sugarcoat the violence and inequity in emerging commercial systems of appropriation and exchange'. (Festa 2006: 17)

<sup>67</sup> Skinner 1999: 10.

<sup>68</sup> Chapone 1777: 156.

<sup>69</sup> Innes 2005: 123. Women's charitable work is addressed in Chapter 5.

person, and therefore a beggar: the closed door of her cottage and her hat and cloak certainly point to her having recently been evicted.<sup>70</sup> As a single woman, most likely a widow, with a child, she is one of the deserving poor and worthy of the charity of her benefactor; the latter is probably the lady of the manor whose country house can be seen in the background. For the rich to be seen dispensing charity was a way of legitimising their wealth, evident here not only in the fashionable dress of the family members but also in the presence of their black servant.<sup>71</sup> By giving alms the lady is demonstrating the family's paternalism, offering reassurance that the traditional obligations of the rich are still being honoured. This virtuous woman, like the dutiful daughter in the blind beggar scenes, confirms that feminine virtue is the prop that ensures that a commercial society can still be a moral community in which social and familial bonds continue to be upheld.

In common with many of the narrative scenes, Bigg's painting represents the woman not only in her social role but also as a mother.<sup>72</sup> She is seen here exercising moral guidance by instructing her children in the social virtue of benevolence; the beggar, as a representative of the deserving poor, is the necessary object of her lesson. The importance of inculcating compassion and benevolence in the young is a theme that recurs in contemporary children's literature in which stories featuring privileged children giving alms to the poor function, as Penny Brown has argued, as 'tools for the social, moral and political conditioning of the young'.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in *The Happy Family* (1791), the young children of Mr Norton, 'a gentleman of easy fortune', buy milk on an early morning walk, but rather than drinking it themselves, give it to 'a poor beggar woman with one child at her back, and another by the side of her'. It is their parents who have taught them such behaviour: 'I am sure we learnt to behave so of my mamma and you'.<sup>74</sup> Some of these books are illustrated: in *Youth's Instructive and Entertaining Story-teller* (1775), for example, we find a woodcut of the young hero Henry, son of the Earl of Moreland, giving alms to a young mendicant in a simple scene of benevolence (figure 2.24).<sup>75</sup> Bigg's earlier painting of schoolboys giving charity to the blind beggar had represented a similar scene, providing reassurance that the

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<sup>70</sup> Tobin 1999: 48.

<sup>71</sup> David Solkin has suggested that the boy's presence could serve to remind the viewer that a significant source of the wealth of such families was the slave trade and the sugar plantations of the West Indies. (Solkin 2015: 240)

<sup>72</sup> Other examples of women, accompanied by their children and giving alms to the beggar, are the prints of James Northcote's *A Young Lady Encouraging the Low Comedian* (1787: BM 1953,0214.61) and Morland's *The Benevolent Lady* (1791: BM 1878,0511.915), and Bigg's undated painting, *Charity* (Tameside Museums and Galleries: The Astley Cheetham Art Collection).

<sup>73</sup> Brown 2008: 419.

<sup>74</sup> Anon. 1791: 7, 17, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Anon. 1775: 83.

next generation would continue to uphold the nation's reputation for benevolence.

However, whether addressed to the visitor at an exhibition or to the young reader, the implication of these visual images is that charity alone is sufficient to address the problem of poverty; moral reform will render any political or economic solution unnecessary.

With their didactic and sentimental narratives, Bigg's scenes of almsgiving brought him commercial success.<sup>76</sup> Unlike the fancy pictures of the child beggar discussed earlier, Bigg's paintings were widely reproduced as prints. Although Solkin has argued that their 'sentimental banalities' appealed to the less discriminating members of the exhibition public, they were in fact also widely praised by critics.<sup>77</sup> *A Lady and Children* was judged 'interesting', a term typically used within sentimentalism to describe a scene that could offer the spectator the pleasure of both emotional and moral participation.<sup>78</sup> Reviewing a later painting by the artist, a critic summed up the features that accounted for Bigg's success: 'he not only presents an agreeable work to the eye, but endeavours to exercise the feelings, and to leave a persuasive moral on the mind'. 'The artist', he continued, 'seems to understand the heart, and to know how to assail it.'<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Bigg's scenes of almsgiving to the beggar served the important ideological function of representing to the elite that theirs was a benevolent nation.

Benevolence was not only the prerogative of the elite woman, however; Francis Wheatley painted rustic narrative scenes in which the female cottager is seen giving alms to the beggar. Wheatley's early work had been in landscape and portraiture, but in the 1780s he began painting fancy pictures and rural scenes. His sentimental narratives were, like those of Bigg, extremely popular and often produced with an eye to the print market.<sup>80</sup> Wheatley painted two rustic scenes of benevolence in which a young woman dispenses charity to a beggar at her cottage door: one has the abstract title, *Rustic Benevolence* (1791), so giving it, like Morland's *Compassion*, an emblematic status. The second painting was engraved as a print in 1788 under the title, *The Benevolent Cottager*, but is most likely the composition that the artist exhibited at the Royal Academy in the same year as *Peasants relieving an old soldier* (figure 2.25). The painting shows a young mother at the door of her cottage with her three children, offering food to a seated mendicant whose

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<sup>76</sup> Bigg returned to the theme of benevolence several times in his career, depicting not only the beggar as the object of charity: see, for example, *The Benevolent Heir* (c. 1797: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection) and *The Soldier's Widow; or, School Boys' Collection* (1800: BM 1868,1212.10).

<sup>77</sup> Solkin 2001: 159.

<sup>78</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 5-8 May 1781; Delon 2013: 708.

<sup>79</sup> *True Briton*, 30 May 1798.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Webster notes 'Wheatley's immense success with the general public'. (Webster 1970: 79)



tattered uniform identifies him as a veteran and whose subservient position is emphasised by the vertical format of the work. Clearly deserving as one who has served his country, he also has the dignity of age. As an old man, he has features in common with representations of Belisarius and the blind beggar; like them, he is a figure of pathos.

Although Wheatley's painting again shows charity as a feminine attribute, it is here a virtue not of the social elite but of the rural poor. The appeal of this work can best be explained by reference to Barrell's argument concerning the earlier cottage scenes of Gainsborough, produced between 1772 and 1788. He finds these scenes to embody the idea 'of the "good" poor', 'imagined just as the polite classes wished they were'.<sup>81</sup> It is this "good" poor that Wheatley's cottager represents: as a wife, her industry is shown by the fallen broom and as a mother, her act of charity provides an example for her children. Moreover, in giving food to the old man, she shows that the poor live comfortably with sufficient to spare for others. Young and beautiful, surrounded by her children, this woman recalls the traditional allegorical representations of Charity as a young mother. The composition's sentimental appeal was further enhanced when the print was made by the addition of a verse inscription taken from Thomas Moss's poem, *The Beggar* (1769):

Pity the Sorrows of a poor old Man!  
Whose trembling Limbs have borne him to your Door,  
Whose Days are dwindled to the shortest Span,  
Oh! give Relief – and Heav'n will bless your Store.<sup>82</sup>

The verse has the pathos of the fragment in Percy's *Reliques* and employs similarly emotive language. For one critic, Wheatley's scenes of rustic benevolence were evidence of a 'Rural Charm' which 'comes with a hold upon the heart, that dignified manners are too lofty to seize'.<sup>83</sup> The female cottager here functions to reassure the elite viewer of the virtue of the rural poor.

Such scenes of rustic benevolence were, however, few in comparison with representations of wealthy women giving alms. By the end of the century, these latter scenes were to take on a further significance in the context of the growing criticism of the landed classes for their lack of civic virtue.<sup>84</sup> Gainsborough's *Charity Relieving Distress*, a

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<sup>81</sup> Barrell 2005: 54.

<sup>82</sup> Moss 1769: 1. These frequently quoted lines were also used to accompany catalogue entries for three later paintings of beggars: T. Taylor, *Beggar man asking alms* (1798), and J. Harris, *Beggar's petition* (1808), both exhibited at the Royal Academy, and Andrew Robertson, *An old beggar* (1808), exhibited at the British Institution.

<sup>83</sup> *Oracle*, 4 May 1791, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Colley 1996: 161-163.

painting that has been cut down, shows how the figure of the benevolent woman, as a representative of the upper class, was used to counter these attacks (figure 2.26). Gainsborough's composition, which dates from 1784, depicts a young woman at the entrance to a large house giving food to a beggar woman and her family. It differs from other narrative scenes by being set in an Italianate landscape and by making a direct reference to Christian charity rather than to the secular, social virtue: a symbolic white dove hovers over the group suggesting that charity is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The significant feature of the print after the painting that was produced in 1801 is the dedication it carries to 'the Nobility & Gentry, whose humane exertions are employed in alleviating the distresses of the Poor'.<sup>85</sup> Although Michael Rosenthal has read the figure of the female almsgiver as a servant, Georgina Cole has argued convincingly that she is, in fact, one of the gentry.<sup>86</sup> Using the evidence of a copy of Gainsborough's work made by Gainsborough Dupont, before the original was cut down, Cole shows that the almsgiver is clearly a member of the wealthy household (figure 2.27). Although, as Cole suggests, the beggar woman may represent the allegorical figure of Charity as a nursing mother, the print was intended to be read in the early nineteenth century less for its abstract symbolism than as a specific reference to the benevolence of the British landed classes.<sup>87</sup>

Gainsborough's painting served the further function of defending the social hierarchy. This purpose was also shared by Morland's narrative scene, *The Squire's Door* (c. 1790), whose title makes specific reference to this hierarchy (figure 2.28). The painting depicts not the squire, however, but his lady, here shown at the door of their country house, giving a coin to a young beggar girl while a groom waits with the horses. The lady's dominant position, looking down on the child, emphasises their difference of rank; however, her act of charity demonstrates the paternalistic benevolence that could bridge such difference. By representing the squire, his lady here reinforces the moral authority of the gentry by associating it with feminine sensibility and benevolence. When the print of Morland's painting was made in the 1790s, its political significance would have been increased by the threat to the social order presented by the French Revolution as it entered its more radical phase.

The focus in this section has been on the benevolent woman as depicted in paintings of the 1780s and 1790s in which the beggar's presence is necessary as the object of her

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<sup>85</sup> Postle 1998: 93.

<sup>86</sup> Rosenthal 1999: 231.

<sup>87</sup> Cole 2015.

charity. Seen together, the two figures performed an ideological function for their viewers, all of whom were members of the elite: the figures both represented the British nation to itself as a benevolent society whilst at the same time highlighting women's role in charitable endeavour. In these scenes, the charity shown by the female figure to the poor serves to confirm the moral order, so allaying widespread anxieties over the weakening of social bonds in a commercial society. At the end of the century, visual displays of a feminised paternalism took on the additional functions for the elite viewer of both justifying the social hierarchy and countering more specific criticisms of the landed class. Furthermore, in her role as a mother, the benevolent woman offered proof that traditional values were being instilled in the young. This figure transcended class boundaries: pictured at her cottage door, the charity of the humble woman served to confirm the virtue of the poor. However, such displays of benevolence depended on suffering: the beggar's presence in the narrative scenes serves as a reminder that these imagined encounters functioned as reassurance that Britain remained a moral community rather than serving as prompts to engage directly with the problem of the poor.

#### Section Four: Sir William Beechey's beggar boy

This final section examines a remarkable painting depicting two wealthy children giving money to a beggar boy which brought together elements of both the single figure fancy picture and the narrative scenes of benevolence. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1793 as *Portraits of children relieving a beggar boy*, it was the work of the well-known portrait painter, Sir William Beechey (figure 2.29). The children here portrayed are identified in a hand-written annotation to Horace Walpole's exhibition catalogue as the son and daughter of the wealthy baronet, Sir Francis Ford; the painting is accordingly now known as *Portrait of Sir Francis Ford's Children giving a Coin to a Beggar Boy*. Beechey's image has been discussed by other scholars; however, the following account focusses on the beggar boy and his function within the painting.

The exceptional nature of the painting lies in its size: the children are represented life-size on a large canvas that, as Myrone has noted, would normally be used only for full-length adult portraits or history paintings.<sup>88</sup> The representation of a child beggar on this scale not only contrasts with the earlier fancy pictures: it was also without precedent and was never repeated. In its depiction of benevolence, the painting echoes the scenes

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<sup>88</sup> Myrone 2015.

discussed in the previous section; here, in a rural, autumnal landscape, a well-dressed boy is depicted with his sister who reaches out to give a coin to a beggar boy standing before them, ill and lame. As in the sentimental narrative scenes, it is the female figure who demonstrates the social virtue of benevolence that here speaks of the fruits of a moral education. The difference of course is that, unlike the narrative scenes, the two children are not social types but are identifiable: Beechey's painting is thus a portrait that combines the extremes of wealth and poverty within its frame.<sup>89</sup>

When the painting was first exhibited, however, most viewers were unaware of the identity of the children; critics read the painting as simply a sentimental scene of benevolence. Ten reviews have survived, more than for any other representation of a beggar: all show a positive public response. Beechey's work was not only 'among the best pictures in the room', but 'the best picture in the rooms, in the opinion of every one present'.<sup>90</sup> The painting was praised for its 'beautiful display of sentiment' where 'the feelings of the children are beautifully expressed'.<sup>91</sup> There was recognition, too, for the didactic element of the work, showing 'visible goodness in the relieving children'.<sup>92</sup> One review in particular makes clear that the response to an image of the child beggar could now be articulated with confidence. Beechey's representation of the sickly child had the power to move this critic to an act of sympathetic identification: 'the poor Boy's countenance and his sensations so legible in the characters of his face, actually make all who behold him shiver with cold'.<sup>93</sup> It is an example of the response identified by Ann Jessie Van Sant in which the scene of suffering is literally experienced in the body of the spectator, and pity becomes 'fundamentally a form of pain'.<sup>94</sup> The critic's response is all the more remarkable since, only six years earlier, John Rising's *A Beggar Boy*, exhibited at the Royal Academy, had been dismissed as 'a very dirty beggar boy', the painting producing only 'the pain of viewing an offensive object' (figure 2.30).<sup>95</sup> If Rising's child beggar is dirtier than Beechey's, then it is only the sole of his left foot that makes him so. The crucial difference is the social context of almsgiving that Beechey provides; the subservience

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<sup>89</sup> The representation of children from different classes without the presence of an adult was also highly unusual. (Steward 1995: 24)

<sup>90</sup> *Gazetteer*, 30 April 1793; *Oracle*, 30 April 1793: 2.

<sup>91</sup> *True Briton*, 3 June 1793; *St. James's Chronicle*, 7-9 May 1793.

<sup>92</sup> *Oracle*, 21 May 1793: 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Royal Academy Critiques*: I, 1768-1793.

<sup>94</sup> Van Sant 1993: 52.

<sup>95</sup> *Whitehall Evening Post*, 12-15 May 1787: 4. A print of the painting was given the abstract title, *Poverty*, so elevating the figure to the status of an emblem.

shown by the boy to his benefactors and the relief here given to his suffering make the child a less disturbing figure so that sympathy becomes possible.

The identification of the Ford children gives their act of benevolence a more specific function. As with Zoffany's work for the Drummonds, Beechey's painting here advertises the moral worth of the head of a *nouveau-riche* family. As a fourth-generation West Indian planter who owned the Lears sugar plantation in Barbados, Sir Francis Ford had a substantial fortune; his marriage to Mary, sister of the politician Thomas Anson, in 1785, brought important connections to the family.<sup>96</sup> He sold the family house in Barbados and moved to England where in 1791 he purchased a country estate, Ember Court, in Surrey.<sup>97</sup> The year 1793, when Beechey's portrait was exhibited, marked the zenith of Ford's career: in February, he was elected member of parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the same month, 'had the honour to kiss his Majesty's hand on being created a Baronet of the realm'.<sup>98</sup> In June his new equipage received a special mention in the *Star*: 'Sir Francis Ford, Bart.'s new chariot. The pannels [*sic*] full yellow, picked out blue, with the arms and crest on the pannels, in rich mantles, lined with yellow cloth and lace, worked with the arms, plated mouldings and joints.'<sup>99</sup> It is most likely that Beechey's painting was a commission to celebrate Ford's new status; certainly, the artist never painted such a portrait again.

As one of the *nouveaux riches*, Ford would have been anxious to establish his legitimacy as a gentleman. This he achieved not only through the material evidence of his country estate and title, but also through a display of the gentlemanly ideals that James Raven has identified as benevolence and a responsible attitude to wealth.<sup>100</sup> To this end, Ford established 'an alms-house, for six poor people, situated near his grounds' at Ember Court.<sup>101</sup> It is these gentlemanly ideals that are celebrated in Beechey's painting in which the two Ford children represent the two different aspects of their father that could not be conveyed in a conventional portrait. The feminine attributes of sensibility and benevolence are given to his daughter on whom the light falls; her brother, as heir to the family's commercial new wealth, presents a more dashing figure in his red suit and feathered hat, here signifying the social status and privilege of the gentleman. Charity is given and social hierarchy marked in an image that promotes Ford's moral and social worth and in which

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<sup>96</sup> An announcement of the death of Sir Francis' father noted that 'a very large Fortune' now 'descends to his only Son'. (*Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, 19 September 1772)

<sup>97</sup> Latham 1999: 89ff.

<sup>98</sup> *General Evening Post*, 7-9 February 1793.

<sup>99</sup> *Star*, 5 June 1793.

<sup>100</sup> Raven 1992: 11.

<sup>101</sup> Anon. 1796.

the inclusion of his children, a beggar boy and a small dog serves to maximise the painting's sentimental appeal.

However, Ford's purpose in commissioning this painting can only be fully understood with reference to the source of his new wealth; as both Myrone and Solkin have made clear, this came from slave-ownership.<sup>102</sup> Significantly, Ford chose to have the painting exhibited at a time when the campaign against slavery and the slave trade was gathering strength, leading to the eventual abolition of the slave trade in 1807. As a planter, Ford had a vested economic interest in the pro-slavery movement; Myrone notes that, as a member of parliament, the baronet took a strong pro-slavery stand. However, records show that he is only known to have spoken once in the House on the subject. On 14th May 1793, when William Wilberforce tried to bring in a bill for the abolition of the slave trade, Ford is reported as urging delaying tactics: 'Mr. FORD expressed some apprehension of danger in agitating this question at this time, and wished to see the subject at rest'.<sup>103</sup> Ford was also named on the title-page of the 1786 publication, *Instructions for the management of a plantation in Barbadoes*, which advocated humane treatment for negro slaves. 'If Negroes are fed plentifully, worked moderately, and treated kindly, they will encrease in most places'.<sup>104</sup> Such treatment would, of course, be in the slavers' interests as a means of maximising profits. Given the strength of the abolition movement, however, slave-owners must have been at pains to demonstrate that their slaves were well looked after.

Indeed, Beechey's painting was exhibited at a time when those opposing abolition were claiming that slaves were in fact better treated than the English poor. Interviewed for the 1789 Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council on the slave trade, Sir Joshua Rowley claimed that slaves in the West Indies 'are much better fed than the common Labourers in England' and seemed to him 'to be much happier than the poor People in this Country'.<sup>105</sup> Conversely, Wilberforce was attacked for caring more about the plight of distant slaves than about the English labourer.<sup>106</sup> Such criticism had been given graphic representation by Richard Newton in 1792 in his satirical print, *Justice and Humanity at Home*, where Wilberforce is shown ignoring both the whipping of an English soldier and a beggar pleading, 'Bestow your Charity and save me from perrishing [*sic*] with Hunger &

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<sup>102</sup> Myrone 2015; Solkin 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Parliamentary Proceedings, 14 May 1793.

<sup>104</sup> Lascelles 1786: 2.

<sup>105</sup> Great Britain. Board of Trade 1789: Part III.

<sup>106</sup> Gatrell 2006: 479.

Cold' (figure 2.31).<sup>107</sup> Myrone has suggested that Beechey's painting can also be read as giving visual form to the pro-slavery argument by emphasising the abject poverty of the beggar boy, here representing England's neglected poor.<sup>108</sup>

However, I would argue that Beechey's painting had a more personal significance for his patron. By offering relief to the boy, the Ford children are demonstrating that Sir Francis not only cared for his slaves but also used his wealth for the benefit of the British poor and especially for the welfare of a suffering child. He would have had as his model the eponymous hero of Sarah Scott's *The history of Sir George Ellison* (1766), a Jamaican planter who was a man of a 'benevolent and charitable disposition', who both treats his slaves humanely and, on retiring to England, relieves the wants of the poor.<sup>109</sup> By showing the Ford children similarly relieving the poor in the person of a boy beggar, Beechey's painting functions to justify the family wealth that had come from the much-criticised slave trade.

Although he played an essential role in the painting's ideological functions, the child beggar remained a disturbing figure even where relief was seen to be given. This unease was openly expressed in a review that appeared in the conservative publication, *The Oracle*: it concluded by observing, 'The whole figure may suggest a Reform of our *Poor Laws*, and excite a temporary throb of pity in breasts, steeled, perhaps, against reality of distress'.<sup>110</sup> This unusual direct reference to social policy implies that the Poor Laws are ineffective in supporting a sick and destitute child and that Britain is not, perhaps, the moral society it believed itself to be. The review, which appeared at a time of intensified debates about the Poor Law, highlights contemporary concerns for the welfare of children and for the problem of poverty in general.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, as Solkin has argued, events in France where the king had been executed the previous year, would have made viewers, who came from the propertied classes, particularly sensitive to the problem of the poor and the potential threat to the social order that they posed.<sup>112</sup> Their fears may well have been stronger than their genuine concern for the poor; the critic acknowledges that any pity aroused in the elite viewer by Beechey's sentimental narrative scene would only be a 'temporary throb'. Joanna Innes has argued that, certainly in the context of sentimental

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<sup>107</sup> The print was published on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1792 shortly after a motion for the gradual abolition of the slave trade had been carried on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1792.

<sup>108</sup> Myrone 2015.

<sup>109</sup> Scott 1766: I, 48.

<sup>110</sup> *Oracle*, 21 May 1793: 2.

<sup>111</sup> For example, Langford notes early concerns about the working conditions of child chimney sweeps. (Langford 1989: 502)

<sup>112</sup> Solkin 2018.

literature, any sympathy the rich experienced remained as 'exercises of the imagination' rather than as a prompt to direct engagement with the problems of the poor.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, Beechey has shown the child's suffering being relieved, so absolving the viewer from any responsibility for the plight of the child. Nevertheless, the review is evidence that the figure of the child beggar could still create unease.

Beechey's painting remains unique for its time, not only in its life-size representation of a full-length beggar boy but also in the impact that it made on the viewing public. The figure performed two ideological functions: as a representative of the deserving poor, the boy prompted the show of benevolence that both justified the immense wealth of Sir Francis and established his social legitimacy as a gentleman. Secondly, the beggar's presence made reference to the contemporary debate about slavery by demonstrating a planter's concern for the welfare of the British poor. However, in drawing attention to the problem of poverty, the painting makes clear that the beggar in general, and the child beggar in particular, remained a continuing source of unease that such scenes of benevolence could not wholly contain.

### Conclusion

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century the challenges faced in representing the beggar as an object of sentiment appeared to have been overcome. By depicting the recognised categories of the deserving poor and by observing aesthetic decorum, artists succeeded in making the problematic mendicant into a more palatable figure. Not only were representations of beggar types exhibited for the elite viewer, but many were reproduced as prints to reach a wider audience. However, signs that the figure could still create unease remained. Although the fancy pictures of child beggars with their references to the Old Masters were bought by aristocratic collectors, these paintings do not appear to have had a wider appeal. For the collectors, the child beggar was a figure remote from their experience and so could be viewed as an aesthetic object; for the middle-class viewer, however, the young mendicant was a more familiar figure whose direct gaze could both challenge and disturb.

In their representations of the blind beggar and in the narrative scenes of benevolence, artists found ways to mitigate this unease. As one unable to return the spectator's gaze, the blind beggar was already a less troubling figure than the suffering child. Moreover, the

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<sup>113</sup> Innes 2009: 219.



introduction of a daughter to the composition could offer reassurance that support for the blind man was being provided. An emphasis on the beggar's age increased the pathos of the figure and the daughter's presence both added an erotic appeal and made a nostalgic reference to traditional familial bonds. Only the sentimental narrative scenes which depicted acts of charity to the deserving beggar, however, found commercial success; such depictions represented for the viewer a nation in which relief was available for the poor. The representation of wealthy female almsgivers and subservient beggars functioned to confirm the social order but also alluded to the prominent role that women now played in charitable work.

Nevertheless, the sentimental response depends on another's distress. Inherent in sentimentalism is the disquiet that such suffering should be allowed: such disquiet could in part be alleviated by scenes of charity and human support, but it could not be wholly suppressed. At the end of the century, faced with Beechey's extraordinary painting of a sickly child beggar, one critic gave voice to this concern that something was amiss, thus challenging the myth of an idealised community. Although the vision of Britain as a humane and benevolent society had persisted throughout the closing decades of the eighteenth century, it was not clear how long it could be sustained.

## Chapter Three

### Locating the beggar in urban and rural landscapes

#### Introduction

This chapter will investigate visual representations of the beggar in the landscapes of both city and country. These are images in which the presence of a beggar might be expected, whether seeking alms on the open road in the countryside or on urban thoroughfares and at points of interchange in the city. The visual material has been drawn from a range of media, from prints and book illustrations to watercolours and oil paintings. Although some of these images have received critical attention, none has been addressed with regard to the figure of the beggar: this discussion will therefore break new ground in this respect. The chapter sets out to establish the extent to which the beggar's presence, or absence, in these landscapes can be related to wider developments in the rural economy and the urban environment that were taking place at the time.

The most significant of these developments were those concerned with 'improvement' in both the countryside and the town. As discussed in the Introduction, historians such as Jeannette Neeson have explored the effects of rural improvement where the spatial strategies of enclosure and emparkment created hardship for the poor. Urban improvement similarly led to the appropriation of space by the wealthy and the consequent displacement of the poor who became a problematic presence on the newly paved streets of the metropolis. In this context, the work of cultural geographers has been useful in reading the space of the landscape as a social construction and an expression of social relations: writing about the landscape of Georgian London, for example, Miles Ogborn has examined the problems involved in creating 'polite and orderly spaces'.<sup>1</sup> Such work by geographers is all the more important insofar as the impact of urban improvement on the poor has received very little attention in contrast to parallel developments in the countryside. By investigating the place of the beggar in the landscape images, this chapter will shed new light on the conflicts over the control of urban and rural spaces that were a consequence of improvement.

If social tensions existed in the physical spaces of the landscape, they were also to be found in the represented spaces of the picturesque. As the antithesis of the improved scene,

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<sup>1</sup> Warf and Aria 2009: 1; Cosgrove 1998: xxv; Ogborn 1998: 114.

the picturesque aesthetic that developed at the end of the eighteenth century valorised unimproved spaces for their aesthetic qualities rather than for their productive potential. Although the picturesque relates primarily to rural scenes, it does have a bearing on the urban landscape, but decreasingly so with the growing emphasis on urban improvement. As considered briefly in the Introduction, art historians such as Ann Bermingham have discussed the political dimension of the picturesque, reading a 'social disdain' in its aestheticisation of poverty.<sup>2</sup> None, however, has specifically addressed the place of the beggar in the picturesque landscape. Although the writings of the theorists of the picturesque suggest the figure to be an appropriate feature of this landscape, my research will show that this is far from being the case; the problems involved in translating picturesque theory into practice will be a key issue addressed. Indeed, by the end of the chapter, it will have become clear how very few spaces could be found for the beggar in any of the images discussed; marginalised in society, the mendicant was also marginalised in visual representations of the landscape.

The following investigation of the beggar's place in the landscape opens with a study of paintings and watercolours that depict the encounter with the small-scale figure of the vagrant in the countryside. A key issue is why so few British artists chose to represent such an encounter when it had been a familiar subject in European landscape paintings of the previous century. The second section considers the place of the beggar in the picturesque landscape; it identifies the problematic nature of the beggar in both the theory and practice of the picturesque and the ways in which this difficulty was addressed. Turning to the urban spaces of London, a discussion of topographical prints of the metropolis follows.<sup>3</sup> It examines the ways in which the beggar's presence or absence in these images reveals the social tensions that arose from London's programme of improvement. The final section returns to the rural landscape to examine visual images in which the figure of the beggar highlights the social consequences that followed from the creation of the improved country estate. The chapter will both identify the problems artists faced in finding a space for the beggar in landscape art and show how such difficulties relate to the socio-economic developments of these years.

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<sup>2</sup> Bermingham 1986: 69.

<sup>3</sup> I understand topographical images as prints and watercolours that seek to give an accurate representation of named places. A picturesque image may similarly represent a named place, but picturesque effects will be of more importance than topographical accuracy.

### Section One: The vagrant in the countryside

Only a very few landscape paintings by eighteenth-century British artists depict encounters with the beggar on the open road. Such images differ from the narrative scenes discussed in the previous chapter in that the figures are depicted on a smaller scale within a wider landscape. Moreover, whereas the beggar in the narrative scenes was indisputably one of the deserving poor, the wandering vagrant who appears in landscape paintings was a more ambiguous figure. As the geographer Tim Cresswell argues, in law the vagrant was 'out of place', their rightful place being in their parish of settlement.<sup>4</sup> With no obvious occupation, clear purpose for travel or visible link to the community, such figures were classified as 'rogues and vagabonds' under the Vagrant Act of 1744 and subject to severe penalties.<sup>5</sup> The vagrant gipsy does appear in landscape art; discussing visual representations of the figure, Sarah Houghton-Walker has argued that by the end of the century, despite their perceived idleness, gipsies had come to be regarded as 'an accepted part of English life', although remaining both 'familiar *and* exotic – always known *and* unknown'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the freedom the gipsies represented added to their appeal.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the vagrant beggar was an altogether more problematic subject. If the artist wanted to depict this figure, the challenge was to make the vagrant acceptable to the viewing public. How artists met such a challenge will be the subject of this section.

Representations of encounters with the vagrant figure were already familiar from two distinct seventeenth-century European traditions of landscape painting. One was the classical Italian landscape of artists such as Claude Lorrain and Gaspard Dughet, both of whom were popular with British collectors and whose works were available as prints. In Dughet's *Classical Landscape* (c. 1672-75), for example, a young boy passes a beggar seated by the side of the road; the small scale of the figures and their classical dress distances them from the viewer (figure 3.1). Paul Sandby drew on this tradition in a watercolour produced in 1761 where, in a landscape dominated by a large tree and distant mountain, a man on horseback gives alms to a one-legged beggar and his family at the side of the road (figure 3.2). Sandby's debt to the earlier tradition is made clear by the Italianate setting and by the rider's seventeenth-century dress, both of which would distance the vagrant figure from a contemporary British audience; moreover, the figure is shown to be

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<sup>4</sup> Cresswell 2011: 245.

<sup>5</sup> 17 Geo. II. c.5 1744.

<sup>6</sup> Houghton-Walker 2014: 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Barrell 1999: 234-235.

deserving since he is disabled and has a family to support. The oval format suggests that the picture was intended for decorative purposes, whilst its reproduction as a print in 1786 is a further indication of its appeal. Sandby's landscape serves to make the potentially problematic figure of the vagrant acceptable to elite taste: the begging vagrant could here be viewed as an aesthetic subject rather than a social problem.

Alternatively, artists could draw on the seventeenth-century tradition of Dutch landscape paintings. In a landscape by Meyndert Hobbema, for example, two well-dressed riders stop by a family of beggars at the side of the road (1668: figure 3.3). Although the figures are similar to the group depicted in Sandby's later work, the setting is more familiar. Instead of ruins and towering mountains, Hobbema here depicts a woodland landscape with rural homesteads seen in the distance, bathed in sunlight. As with Sandby, however, the focus is on the setting in which the figures, both peasants and gentry, function as staffage.<sup>8</sup> As noted by Solkin, by the mid 1740s such 'scenes of common nature' had begun to attract the interests of English collectors.<sup>9</sup>

Although several British artists would make pictorial reference to the Dutch landscape tradition, it was only Thomas Gainsborough, in two exceptional oil paintings, who drew on the iconography of the encounter with the beggar on the open road. The earlier of the paintings, *Evening Landscape* (c. 1768-71), depicts a country landscape in which a girl and boy lead two horses loaded with panniers of produce, followed by mounted peasants (figure 3.4).<sup>10</sup> The artist's debt to the Dutch tradition can be seen not only in the woodland setting and peasant figures but also in the careful observation of natural detail; he seems especially close to the work of landscape painters such as Hobbema in depicting a cottage irradiated by golden sunlight in the background. Among the figures Gainsborough depicts two female beggars, a girl and an older woman, who sit in the shadows by the side of the road. However, although the boy at the head of the cavalcade points them out, his companion averts her gaze. By representing the two vagrant figures as unsupported women, Gainsborough has removed the threat associated with the male vagrant and even invites sympathy for their plight. Nevertheless, his inclusion of the vagrants in his landscape remains highly unusual.

Their presence has led Michael Rosenthal to read the painting as offering a social

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<sup>8</sup> Other examples include *Landscape with a woman giving alms to a beggar* (1618-76) by Jean Baptiste Bonnacroy (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), and *A Dune Landscape* (c. 1660-68) by Philips Wouwerman (National Gallery, London)).

<sup>9</sup> Solkin 2015: 116.

<sup>10</sup> Known as *Going to Market* in the nineteenth century, Michael Rosenthal has since argued that it is an evening scene. (Rosenthal 1999: 202)

critique.<sup>11</sup> He finds evidence in *Evening Landscape* of the negative consequences of rural improvement that had been described in Oliver Goldsmith's poem, *The Deserted Village*, published in 1770. In former times, so the poet writes, 'every rood of ground maintain'd its man', and 'the vagrant train' was sure of a welcome at the house of the parish priest.<sup>12</sup> However, in the poem, emparkment by an improving landowner brings the changes seen in Gainsborough's painting; deprived of the common land which had once supported their needs, the peasants must now travel to market. The presence of the two beggars is evidence that displacement has led to vagrancy; moreover, the lack of concern shown for the destitute figures indicates that moral decline has accompanied social change. Such an interpretation is persuasive, suggesting as it does that the painting could have appealed to the reading public; however, it does not take into account the conditions of its production and reception.

*Evening Landscape* needs more specifically to be read with reference to the aristocratic patron by whom it was commissioned. John, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Bateman, was a wealthy landowner whose family fortune had been made by his grandfather, a merchant financier. As a Whig member of parliament and one whose fortune came from the city, Bateman's background was typical of the men responsible for rural improvement, which would make any explicit critique of the movement on the artist's part unlikely. Bateman owned the Palladian mansion, Shobdon Court, in Herefordshire, where he had assembled a collection of paintings, including several works by Gainsborough. Contemporary guides to Herefordshire singled out Bateman not only for his 'constantly practised hospitality and friendship' but also for his social responsibility as a landowner.<sup>13</sup> One observer noted that 'this immense tract of land is employed, not merely in *parks* and *pleasure grounds*, but in the manner that is most likely to produce the greatest possible quantity of food for society'. Here, 'the poor are more comfortably maintained than probably any equal number of the same station in the kingdom'.<sup>14</sup> The focus in *Evening Landscape* may therefore be less on the lack of charity shown by the peasants and more on the implied contrast between the fruits of a landowner's benevolent paternalism, seen in the sunlit cottage and the contented figures around it, and the harsh consequences of irresponsible agrarian improvement, as represented by the destitute figures at the side of the road. Read thus, Gainsborough's

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<sup>11</sup> Rosenthal 1999: 202.

<sup>12</sup> Goldsmith 1794: 43, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Baker 1795: III, 215-216.

<sup>14</sup> Clark 1794: 16-17.

painting functions not so much as a social critique but rather to flatter Bateman as a benevolent landowner.

Gainsborough again addressed the subject of an encounter with the female vagrant in *Open Landscape* (1770: figure 3.5). The painting depicts a group of peasants on horseback ascending a hill on their way to market and passing a woman seated by the side of the road who is nursing her baby while another child sleeps on her lap.<sup>15</sup> Although she meets the gaze of the boy leading the procession, she elicits no response from the group. Here Gainsborough represents the destitute woman as a more obvious object of sympathy. Alone on the road with her children in the early morning, she appears to be a vagrant and out of place: she has no basket that might link her to the rural economy nor can any wider community to which she might belong be discerned. If she is a vagrant, however, she does not conform to the stereotype of popular imagination but is an idealised figure, reminiscent of the earlier Italian landscape tradition. With her black hair and dark skin, she may possibly, as Susan Sloman has suggested, be a gipsy, which would add an exotic appeal to the painting.<sup>16</sup> Whether vagrant or gipsy, however, she prompts only pity for her plight.

*Open Landscape* also makes a further pictorial reference to an earlier Dutch landscape. As Sloman has noted, the subject and composition of the painting owe much to the engraving, *Le Retour du Marché*, after the Dutch seventeenth-century artist, Philips Wouwerman, which depicts two peasants in a horse-drawn cart passing a nursing mother seated by the side of the road (figure 3.6).<sup>17</sup> Gainsborough's landscape differs from the Dutch print, however, in emphasising the isolation of the vagrant figure by relegating her to the shadows and increasing the number of peasants. Whereas in the print the two peasants look down at the seated woman, the nursing mother in Gainsborough's scene is ignored by all except one of the peasants, who stares but takes no action. *Open Landscape* can therefore be read, like the artist's earlier landscape, as a critique of a society in which the peasants, intent on the day's business, have no time for the needy. Any such critique, however, was not recognised by contemporaries. Visiting Stourhead in 1798, William Gilpin had only praise for 'Some Market peasants, by Gainsborough': 'both the figures and the effect of this picture are pleasing'.<sup>18</sup> The indifference shown to the vagrant woman was not noted.

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Sloman's research has suggested that the rear figures are colliers. (Sloman 1997/8: 49)

<sup>16</sup> Sloman 2002: 182. An earlier work by Gainsborough, to which the artist added the title *Landscape with Gipsies* when it was engraved, had idealised a young gipsy mother.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid: 183. The print was published by Robert Strange in 1750 and appeared in a catalogue of his work published around 1770. (Strange 1770?)

<sup>18</sup> Gilpin 1798: 119.

Moreover, any obvious critique of commercial society would not have been welcomed by Gainsborough's patron. *Open Landscape* was painted for the wealthy banker Henry Hoare, who paid eighty guineas for it in 1773.<sup>19</sup> Like Bateman, Hoare was a man of new wealth which came from finance; he was also a member of parliament although, unlike Bateman, a Tory. He had made the Grand Tour in the late 1730s and had bought many paintings, including works by Claude, Cuyp and Poussin, as well as Rembrandt, to hang in his Picture Gallery at Stourhead.<sup>20</sup> His taste for Italianate landscapes is evident not only in the Old Masters he acquired but also in works he commissioned from contemporary British artists.<sup>21</sup> By blending the classical and Dutch landscape traditions in *Open Landscape*, Gainsborough produced a painting that would not only meet his patron's artistic tastes but also, in its reference to the Old Masters, render the vagrant an acceptable figure. In this, as in his earlier landscape, the identity of Gainsborough's patron is a significant factor in understanding the artist's representation of the female vagrant.

Gainsborough's two landscapes remain exceptional in their depiction of the encounter with a begging vagrant. It is significant that neither was exhibited nor engraved, so would only have been viewed by a very exclusive audience. The subject continued to be unusual in the last decades of the eighteenth century which is likely to be because of the hardening of attitudes to vagrancy in these years. Historians have noted that after 1780 demands for a more aggressive, interventionist response to vagrancy increased.<sup>22</sup> Demobilisation at the end of the American War in 1783 led to a sharp increase in prosecutions for vagrancy and crime; the same year an act was passed extending the categories of vagrancy and tightening the enforcement of the vagrancy laws.<sup>23</sup> Contemporary writers reveal the hostility to 'the incorrigible vagrant who has no fixed residence, no social ties, but with rogues and vagabonds, nor any honest means of subsistence'.<sup>24</sup> Any landscape artist who would represent the vagrant figure for the commercial market continued to face a challenge in making the figure palatable.

The only two other landscapes depicting the encounter with the vagrant that I have identified address the problem by incorporating narrative scenes of benevolence within a landscape setting. Unlike both Gainsborough's landscapes and the narrative scenes

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<sup>19</sup> Hayes 1982: II, 313.

<sup>20</sup> Sloman 1997/8: 48.

<sup>21</sup> Hoare commissioned landscapes from John Wootton and Italian views from Arthur Pond. (Woodbridge 1965: 89)

<sup>22</sup> Lees 1998: 106; Rogers 1991: 142.

<sup>23</sup> Innes: 2009: 184.

<sup>24</sup> M'Farlan 1782: 466



discussed in the previous chapter, however, these are in the medium of watercolour: such works were likely to be kept in portfolios or hung in private rooms rather than public spaces.<sup>25</sup> Viewed in a private setting, the problematic aspects of the vagrant would have been contained. The first of these pictures is *The Benevolent Lady* (1770), by the Irish artist John James Barralet, which was reproduced as a print in 1780 (figure 3.7).<sup>26</sup> In a scene on the edge of a forest, dominated by a picturesque, half-riven tree, in a clear demonstration of social dominance a well-dressed woman on horseback is giving alms to a mother and her children who beg at the side of the road. The image reassures the viewer that both the social and the moral order are being upheld, since the single mother and her family are clearly representatives of the deserving poor. The second picture, an anonymous watercolour, *Beggars and Horseman* (1798), similarly contains the potential threat of the vagrant figure by representing him as a deserving, lame beggar, accompanied by two women, one with a child (figure 3.8). Here, too, the gentleman who stops to give alms is a mounted figure, asserting social dominance. However, even such mild treatments of the vagrant subject appear to have been more than was acceptable, given their rarity.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence of these two pictures qualifies the social historian K. D. M. Snell's argument that English landscape art of the second half of the century saw an increase in images of the migrant poor that represented them as a class apart, not interacting with their social superiors.<sup>28</sup> However, if these pictures are atypical in this respect, they are also atypical in depicting the migrant beggar at all. The evidence has shown that despite the European traditions of landscape painting which featured the encounter with the begging vagrant on the road, few British artists in the eighteenth century chose to represent this subject. The social and moral issues associated with the vagrant made the figure too challenging. Gainsborough's two landscapes remain exceptional: given that they are both commissioned works, the artist may have chosen to represent the female vagrant with the patron in mind, whether to meet his ideological needs or to accord with his aesthetic tastes (or, of course, both). Although other artists did address the problem of representing the vagrant figure by creating scenes of benevolence on the open road, the subject remained unusual in British landscape painting. As one out of place, the vagrant beggar continued to be a disturbing figure.

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<sup>25</sup> Barrell 1983: 432.

<sup>26</sup> The original is in Trinity College, Dublin.

<sup>27</sup> A late watercolour by Paul Sandby, *An old castle with horseman* (c. 1798-1809), shows a mounted gentleman approaching a woman and child begging by the side of the road, but does not depict an act of benevolence. (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Merseyside)

<sup>28</sup> Snell 2013: 74.

## Section Two: The picturesque beggar

The key issue to be addressed in this section is the claim that the beggar was a frequent presence in the picturesque landscapes that were produced towards the end of the eighteenth century. This claim has been made by more than one art historian; Malcolm Andrews, for example, finds beggars to be among 'the figures favoured by later Picturesque tastes', while Charlotte Klonk includes them among those who became 'the staple of picturesque staffage'. Similar claims have been made by literary scholars such as Donna Landry, who contends that 'gypsies or other vagrants' number among 'the Picturesque's characteristic content'; Raimondo Modiano likewise argues that destitutes appear with 'astonishing frequency in the literature and art of the period'.<sup>29</sup> By examining both the theory and the practice of the picturesque, this section will assess the evidence for these claims.

To this end, it is necessary to start by considering picturesque theory as it was elaborated by the most influential exponent of the theory and practice of the picturesque. In his most fully developed statement of the theory, *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1792), William Gilpin identifies the features that define the picturesque both in the landscape and in painting; namely, the '*roughness*' and '*ruggedness*' of objects, the effects of contrast, and a composition that unites 'a variety of parts' into 'one whole'.<sup>30</sup> Gilpin not only encouraged the tourist to seek out these features in the landscape but also offered advice to the traveller on sketching the picturesque scenes. In his instructions to make 'little alterations' to assist nature's defects, Gilpin reveals that the picturesque landscape was as much an artificially constructed space as the improved landscape, despite their seemingly antithetical appearance and purpose.<sup>31</sup> Any figures that the artist might wish to introduce were to be merely decorative, 'the ornament of scenes'; indeed, Gilpin views them as additions whose function may be no more than 'to break a piece of foreground'.<sup>32</sup> The amateur artist is to remain disengaged from the figures she/he encounters for, 'if by bringing the figures forward on the foreground, you give room for *character*, and *expression*, you put them out of place as *appendages*, for which they were intended'.<sup>33</sup> Such a downgrading of the significance of the human figure contrasts with the primacy it

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<sup>29</sup> Andrews 1989: 25; Klonk 1996: 27; Landry 2008: 95; Modiano 1994: 196.

<sup>30</sup> Gilpin 1794: 6, 20, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid: 67. The point is made by Barrell. (Barrell 1972: 59ff.)

<sup>32</sup> Gilpin 1794: 44, 77.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid: 137.

traditionally assumed not only in the artistic, but also in the moral and social hierarchies. Moreover, by remaining disengaged, the viewer avoids the problematic issues associated with the figures. Gilpin has no qualms about introducing such morally troubling figures as 'banditti fierce' and 'gypsy-tribes' since for him they have no significance other than as adornments to the picturesque scene.<sup>34</sup>

Although it should follow that Gilpin would have no problem with the representation of the beggar as an ornament in a picturesque landscape, this would appear not to be the case. Tiny figures do appear in the sketches that he drew to illustrate the tour books that he had begun to write in the 1770s, but which were only published later. However, these figures are almost always travellers, surrogates for the tourists to whom these works were addressed. Only very occasionally does Gilpin include local figures, such as two fishermen seen at Rye.<sup>35</sup> However, in his *Observations on the River Wye* (1782), Gilpin's text makes much of the fact that the inhabitants of Tintern Abbey were in fact beggars who had made their home in the ruins of the monastery. The question therefore arises as to whether the figures depicted in Gilpin's two accompanying illustrations of Tintern represent these beggars (figures 3.9, 3.10). Rejecting such an identification, Stephen Copley argues that Gilpin has replaced the view of impoverished beggars 'with two lightly sketched and characteristically posed figures in each print', similar to those in other of the author's illustrations.<sup>36</sup> This may be true of the image in which a traveller is resting on a staff; however, the hunched figures in the other image show no interest in the view nor is there anything to identify them as tourists. The possibility that they represent two beggars is strengthened by the fact that in later editions of the text (1789, 1792 and 1800), the figures were removed from both illustrations. If two were beggars, then their removal suggests that, despite his theoretical acceptance of such vagrant figures as 'gypsy-tribes' in the picturesque, the beggar remained for Gilpin a more problematic presence.

The cause of Gilpin's unease can be found in the emphasis in the accompanying text on the beggars' idleness. In a show of anti-Catholic sentiment, Gilpin, as an Anglican clergyman, describes the monastery as having been 'once devoted to indolence'; likewise, the present inhabitants are themselves idle and 'seem to have no employment, but begging'.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, Gilpin had argued that, to the picturesque eye, 'the loitering peasant' was more pleasing than 'the industrious mechanic': even idleness can add 'dignity' to a

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<sup>34</sup> Gilpin 1794: 119.

<sup>35</sup> Gilpin 1804: 64.

<sup>36</sup> Copley 1997: 145.

<sup>37</sup> Gilpin 1782: 35.

character'.<sup>38</sup> However, whereas the loitering peasant is merely taking a break from their labours, the beggar has made idleness into a profession. On the evidence of his sermons, Gilpin regarded wilful idleness as a sin: in one, he condemns those who 'shamefully run to the parish for relief', often because they 'want *industry* in providing for their families'.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Gilpin was by no means uncharitable: he oversaw the building of a new poorhouse at his parish in Boldre with the aim of ensuring the poor were 'well lodged, well fed and well cloathed [*sic*]'.<sup>40</sup> In short, Gilpin was far from adopting a single consistent position towards the problem of idleness. As a clergyman, he hoped to reform it; as a moralist, he condemned it, but, as a picturesque theorist, he condoned its representation.

Gilpin could not entirely separate these conflicting viewpoints. As already stated, he had found the vagrant in Gainsborough's *Open Landscape*, viewed here as a purely aesthetic object, to be among figures who were 'pleasing'. Visiting Nuneham House in Oxfordshire in 1796, he observed that a painting by Murillo of two beggars was among those that 'particularly pleased the eye at sight'.<sup>41</sup> However, faced with the overwhelming physical presence of the beggars at Tintern, Gilpin was clearly troubled by their wretchedness. Although Copley may not recognise the Tintern illustration as representing beggars, he nevertheless argues of the ruin's inhabitants that Gilpin 'cannot extend the category of the picturesque unproblematically to cover them'.<sup>42</sup> This remains true whether Copley is right and the beggars could not be represented at all, or whether they were in fact represented but later removed. For Gilpin, the depiction of the beggar in an actual place was very different from its depiction in the high art of Gainsborough or Murillo.

Later theorists of the picturesque did not share Gilpin's difficulty in extending the category to include the beggar. In his *Essay on the picturesque* (1796), the wealthy landowner Sir Uvedale Price addressed the picturesque in the context of the landscape garden. Rejecting the formality of the gardens designed by 'Capability' Brown, Price argued instead for irregularity and variety. The significance of his *Essay* here is that the objects he identifies as having picturesque properties are those familiar from the paintings of Dutch landscape artists such as Hobbema, whose work was increasingly highly regarded.<sup>43</sup> For Price, 'hovels, cottages, mills, ragged insides of old barns and stables, &c.' are picturesque buildings whilst the figures that appeal to the picturesque eye are the

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<sup>38</sup> Gilpin 1786: II, 44.

<sup>39</sup> Gilpin 1791: 4.

<sup>40</sup> Gilpin 1796?: 8.

<sup>41</sup> Gilpin 1786: I, 24-25.

<sup>42</sup> Copley 1997: 149.

<sup>43</sup> Dunthorne 1987: 47.

'rough' and 'tattered' among 'our own species', including the beggar.<sup>44</sup> In a later *Dialogue*, Price makes clear that, although such figures can, when encountered in life, arouse 'animal disgust and nauseating repugnance of appetite', their picturesque qualities nevertheless make them 'highly suited to the painter and his art'.<sup>45</sup> Price was not the only theorist to find the beggar a picturesque figure. In *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1806), another wealthy landowner Sir Richard Payne Knight argued that recognition of the picturesque depended on the perception of the viewer rather than any property inherent in an object. To the trained eye, 'the dirty and tattered garments, the dishevelled hair, and general wild appearance of gipsies and beggar girls' afford pleasure to the viewer.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in the theoretical writings of both Price and Knight, the beggar was clearly identified as a picturesque subject.

For the beggar to be perceived as picturesque, the figure had to remain distanced as a purely aesthetic object. However, as Bermingham has argued, such distancing was hierarchical in its implications, amounting to a 'social disdain'.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, for Knight, the picturesque was an exclusive taste available only to the elite; picturesque objects can afford pleasure only to those 'conversant with the art of painting' and able to recognise its excellencies.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, several scholars have noted how the picturesque eye avoids any moral engagement with the poverty of the picturesque subject.<sup>49</sup> Bermingham goes further in arguing that this absence of concern for human values can be read as revealing that the picturesque in fact endorsed the economic hardship that agricultural improvement was creating at the time and so inscribed the values of the landowning class.<sup>50</sup> For men such as Price and Knight, the beggar could be viewed as picturesque only because they had objectified the figure and any associated moral or social issues had been suppressed.

Ironically, the popular perception of the picturesque spectator was not of a detached viewer but rather of one who responded with excessive sensibility to the picturesque scene. In his comic operetta, *The Lakers* (1798), for example, James Plumptre dramatised an encounter with a beggar in order to satirise the sentimental excesses of the picturesque female tourist. Arriving in Keswick, intent on both viewing and sketching the picturesque scenes, Miss Beccabunga Veronica comes across a blind beggar in the marketplace. She

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<sup>44</sup> Price 1796: 66, 76.

<sup>45</sup> Price 1801: 108, 117.

<sup>46</sup> Knight 1806: 155-156.

<sup>47</sup> Bermingham 1986: 69.

<sup>48</sup> Knight 1806: 146.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Andrews 1989: 59.

<sup>50</sup> Bermingham 1986: 75, 83.

exaggerates her response, exclaiming as she drops a shilling in the beggar's hat, 'what a powerful appeal to a too susceptible heart!' 'These quick vibrations of the fine fibres of my heart are too much for so slender a frame.'<sup>51</sup> Not only does her name identify her as an object of satire, but she must have represented a familiar stereotype that the audience could both recognise and enjoy. However, her display of sentiment over a suffering figure is very different from the detached response expected of the spectator in the theoretical writings on the picturesque: within this literature, the beggar remained an aesthetic object and a source of picturesque charm.

A similar divergence exists between the theory of the picturesque and its practice by landscape painters. Despite the approval given by Price and Knight to the beggar as an appropriate subject, and despite the claims of modern scholars, I have found no clear evidence that the beggar is among the figures who form 'the staple of picturesque staffage'. In fact, the mendicant can only rarely be identified among the small-scale and often indistinct figures who populate picturesque landscapes. One exception is Thomas Girtin's watercolour of the west entrance of St Alban's Abbey in Hertfordshire in which the clearly recognisable figure of a beggar stands, holding out his hat for alms (c. 1797: figure 3.11). Although it has a topographical setting, Girtin's landscape here features both a picturesque subject and picturesque effects: the artist uses the play of light and shadow and emphasises the rough and irregular surface of the masonry. The tiny, indistinct figure of the beggar, clearly a late addition to the painting, is dwarfed by the great arch of the entrance. If he is merely one of Gilpin's 'appendages', he nevertheless draws the viewer's eye, forming as he does a dark silhouette against the illuminated inner wall.

I would argue, however, that Girtin's beggar functions here as more than a mere picturesque ornament. On Gilpin's visit to St Albans, he had noted the 'many remains of beautiful Gothic in this church'.<sup>52</sup> He uses the term here to refer to the architectural style; however, at the time he was writing, 'Gothic' carried wider connotations. As Michael Charlesworth has argued, earlier in the century, when the Jacobite threat of the return of a Roman Catholic monarchy was still strong, the ruined Gothic abbey could be a symbol of the triumphant overthrow of Catholic superstition.<sup>53</sup> By the time of Girtin's painting, long after the Jacobite threat had receded, the Gothic had come to connote the more positive aspects of the pre-Reformation church. Alexandrina Buchanan has argued that ancient

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<sup>51</sup> Plumptre 1798: 13,14.

<sup>52</sup> Gilpin 1786: II, 265.

<sup>53</sup> Charlesworth 1994: 69.

abbeys symbolised 'a departed source of charity'; similarly, Rosemary Sweet, writing on eighteenth-century antiquarianism, argues that the medieval society which built these abbeys came to be seen as one of 'greater social stability, charity and relative simplicity'.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in a period of rapid social and economic change, the ruined abbey could exert a nostalgic appeal by evoking a more traditional, benevolent society. In this context, the beggar in Girtin's painting can be seen to reinforce the reference made by the Abbey and its ruins to these traditional social values. As a ghost-like figure, the lines of stonework clearly visible through his form, with no audience but the viewer, he functions as a call from the past for charity. Situated in an ecclesiastical context, the figure is transformed from the merely picturesque into a potent signifier.

The figure of the beggar performs the same function in a later watercolour by Girtin of an urban scene depicting picturesque old buildings. *Ouse Bridge, York* (1800), shows the bridge spanning the river and, to the right, the tiny figures of a mother and her children, one of whom is giving alms to a beggar (figure 3.12). To the left can be seen two buildings, one of which is the Chapel of St William, dating from the construction of the original medieval bridge, although its use as a church ceased at the Reformation.<sup>55</sup> The other has been identified by Greg Smith as the Prison for Debtors and Felons.<sup>56</sup> A correspondent to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, writing in 1805 about prisons in Yorkshire, noted that a stone tablet (not visible in the painting) was fixed into the wall of the prison: its inscription read, 'Remember the poor debtors. *He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.*'<sup>57</sup> In this context, the charitable exchange between child and beggar signifies both the need for charity and the blessing bestowed on the almsgiver, a message reinforced by the Chapel. Here, in a scene representing picturesque ancient structures, the beggar is not simply a decorative object but one whose signifying function adds a moral dimension to the landscape.

The iconography of the deserving beggar in urban scenes had a long history: Nichols notes that as early as the sixteenth century, the figure was often represented in 'the central spaces of cities'.<sup>58</sup> The figure could still be found in some of the prints that illustrated the many antiquarian and topographical publications then being produced to celebrate Britain's past. In the sixth volume of *The Antiquities of England and Wales*, published in 1785, the

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<sup>54</sup> Buchanan 2002: 38; Sweet 2004: 232.

<sup>55</sup> The bridge shown here dates from the sixteenth century: both it and the Chapel were demolished around 1810.

<sup>56</sup> Smith 2002: 177.

<sup>57</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1805: 399.

<sup>58</sup> Nichols 2007a: 18.

antiquary Francis Grose included an earlier engraving, produced in 1765, of Malmesbury's Market Cross (figure 3.13). It shows a lame beggar receiving alms, signifying the need for charity; the Christian significance of the act is reinforced by the cross just as the act itself points to the meaning of the Christian symbol. This traditional iconography of a beggar at the town cross was also introduced by the watercolourist Michael Angelo Rooker into an urban topographical landscape showing the picturesque ruin of Eleanor's Cross, near Waltham Abbey (figure 3.14). Probably identifiable with a work exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1775, it includes a beggar standing, cap in hand.<sup>59</sup> Juxtaposed with the ancient cross, however, is the coaching inn, The Falcon, a clear sign of modernity; the straight lines of its structure contrast with the irregular outline of the Eleanor Cross.<sup>60</sup> Although Rooker may have included the beggar as a familiar presence at such sites of urban interchange, the figure again introduces a moral dimension to the scene. Not only is he standing in front of a ruined Gothic cross, but his appeal for charity seems likely to be ignored by the man seen alighting from the coach, caught up in the bustle of modern life. Here again the beggar cannot simply be viewed as a picturesque object.<sup>61</sup>

The very small number of images that represent the beggar in landscapes with picturesque features challenges the claims made for their ubiquity. Moreover, the scarcity of the figure suggests that, despite the approval given by both Price and Knight to the beggar's presence, the mendicant continued to be as problematic a figure for the elite viewer as it had been for Gilpin. The beggar seems only to have appeared in urban topographical landscapes that featured picturesque old buildings with an ecclesiastical association. It is clear that the figure could only be represented in a moral context, thus engaging the spectator in a way inappropriate for a strictly picturesque scene. The beggar could not, in the end, be viewed as a purely aesthetic object and for this reason could never have become the 'staple of picturesque staffage'.

### Section Three: The London beggar

The beggar who had become out of place in the countryside proved similarly hard to accommodate in a capital city in the throes of improvement. Although much has been

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<sup>59</sup> The 1775 Royal Academy exhibition catalogue lists *Waltham [sic] Cross*, by M. A. Rooker (no. 250).

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Maudlin argues that in the eighteenth century, the coaching inn represented 'modern, metropolitan values'. (Maudlin 2019: 648)

<sup>61</sup> Two further urban topographical landscapes by Rooker that similarly depict the beggar near picturesque ecclesiastical ruins or ancient buildings, are *Abbey Gate, Bury St Edmunds* (1788-1801: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), and *Winchelsea Churchyard* (by 1801: Royal Academy, London).



written about the consequences for the poor of rural improvement, less work exists on the social consequences of improvement in the metropolis. One of the very few scholars to briefly address this subject, Paul Langford, has argued that in contrast to earlier assumptions that in urban surroundings rich and poor should live in close proximity in a harmonious hierarchy, building development both in and around London brought social zoning to the capital, increasing the separation of the classes.<sup>62</sup> I extend his work by examining the visual evidence for such social tensions in the capital, focusing on how representations of the beggar make such tensions manifest. I draw on three London topographical print series by Edward Rooker, Thomas Malton and John Thomas Smith; produced between 1768 and 1815, they span the period covered by this study. They therefore provide a sound basis for investigating the consequences of improvement for the London beggar and, by extension, for the London poor more generally.

The earliest of the three series is *Six London Views*, produced by Rooker in 1768 from designs by his son, Michael Angelo, and the two Sandby brothers, Paul and Thomas. Sold by subscription at sixteen shillings a set, it was aimed at the upper end of the metropolitan print market, offering its elite audience scenes of London's landmarks.<sup>63</sup> The emphasis falls on the modern architecture of the metropolis, with two prints giving graphic representations of a city in the midst of improvement. One shows the construction of Blackfriars Bridge, eventually completed in 1769; the other depicts a scene at St James's Gate where stonemasons are hard at work (figure 3.15). London's historic buildings were not forgotten, however: St James's Gate was all that survived of the palace commissioned by Henry VIII. Such topographical prints were not new but differed significantly from earlier images, as can be seen by a comparison with the print, *A View of the Hospital of Bethlehem*, produced around 1760 by an unknown artist (figure 3.16). Whereas Rooker's print places the spectator at street level, the earlier engraving had offered a prospect view of the London hospital; the static, symmetrical scene contrasts with the busy street life depicted at St James's Gate. It also features the tiny figure of a beggar in the foreground, receiving alms from a gentleman. Here, in the setting of a charitable institution, the mendicant functions to represent one extreme of the hierarchical social order and, as the recipient of charity, to make manifest society's moral values. By contrast, the later print depicts a disorderly scene with no evidence of almsgiving.

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<sup>62</sup> Langford 1998: 449-450.

<sup>63</sup> Bonehill 2012: 366.

Although no beggar is present at St James's Gate, the figure does appear in three other of Rooker's *Views*, but with a very different function. A blind beggar stands in the archway that frames the Horse Guards building; a man begs in Covent Garden Piazza, and a family of beggars stand outside St Paul's, Covent Garden, where a funeral procession is about to pass (figures 3.17, 3.18, 3.19). However, in none of these scenes is charity forthcoming: all three images depict a mix of social groups, but each group remains separate, never interacting. John Bonehill has argued that the *Six London Views* offer an understated satire insofar as they criticise the disorderly streets of London, and hence put the case 'for a more orderly re-visioning of London'. At Horse Guards, for example, the plaster on the archway is crumbling and the classes are thrown together as a family of brush sellers shares the space with two well-dressed women emerging from a doorway: as Bonehill notes, the scene conveys 'a sense of the cramped confines of the city streets'.<sup>64</sup> However, if the print represents the social disorder of London's streets, I would argue it further represents a moral disorder: the isolation of the beggar here functions to signify the loss of the traditional values of compassion and benevolence. Such a reading would suggest that the architectural improvements taking place in London needed to be matched by a renewal of social bonds.

A more orderly view of London is evident in the later print series by Malton who specialised in architectural subjects. *A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster* was issued in separate numbers between 1792 and 1801, eventually comprising one hundred aquatints of the metropolis. Published by subscription, it was aimed at a highly select audience: in 1803, the complete *Tour* cost seventeen pounds ten shillings. It is a picturesque publication in the sense not only that it is illustrated but that it also offers an aesthetically pleasing view of the cityscape. The artist's purpose was twofold: firstly, to 'trace the Progress of the Arts, from the reign of Henry III. to the present era', and secondly, to display 'some of the most marked features of the emporium of this free and envied country', in order to impress upon the reader 'the exterior magnificence of an extensive City', and 'the opulence of its inhabitants'.<sup>65</sup> The choice of the word 'emporium' is significant, situating London as it does at the centre of the modern commercial world. In the text, Malton takes the reader through the streets of London, offering commentary, statistics and historical detail. He seeks out 'picturesque beauty', noting, for example, 'the east-end of Westminster-Abbey, which rises beautifully

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<sup>64</sup> Bonehill 2012: 366, 384.

<sup>65</sup> Malton 1792; I, iv, 1.

picturesque above the buildings on the east side'.<sup>66</sup> He condemns those modern improvements that lack taste but still finds much to admire in the new, singling out 'Somerset Place' as 'the greatest national structure of the present century'.<sup>67</sup> The *Tour* clearly succeeded in its purpose: one review praised 'this truly elegant and useful production' as offering 'a collection of views of the principal edifices in a magnificent city', which 'always affords a gratifying sight'.<sup>68</sup> Anna Maude has observed that Malton's 'grand vision of London' laid stress on 'its status, civility, and pomp'.<sup>69</sup> The *Tour* thus made its appeal both to civic and to national pride.

In such a celebratory volume, London's street beggars have no place. Malton imposes order on the disordered scenes of the earlier *London Views* by censoring their inhabitants; the citizens depicted are for the most part small, genteel figures who function as picturesque staffage. Where low life is admitted, as in the case of the street traders at Temple Bar, the figures are indistinct. None of them, however, is identifiable as a beggar, with the possible exception of a lame woman seated on the pavement outside St George's, Bloomsbury (figure 3.20). Her degrading position suggests she may indeed be a beggar, although well-dressed: moreover, St George's was near the notoriously poor neighbourhood of St Giles's.<sup>70</sup> However, Malton's exclusion of identifiable beggars from the scenes of the *Tour* appears deliberate. An earlier aquatint made by the artist of *The Bank* does depict a peg leg beggar seeking alms, but in the prints of the Bank in the later *Tour*, no such figure can be seen (figure 3.21). Malton's plates function to inspire pride in the city's landmarks, not to provide an accurate record of its less attractive street life.

Just how far London's low life has been moved off stage can be demonstrated by comparing a view in Malton's *Tour* with the same site in the earlier series. Both views represent Covent Garden Piazza: Rooker had highlighted the classical architecture in his print, but had filled the foreground with lively young boys, a seated trader and a beggar (figure 3.18). By contrast, Malton's print includes no such low-life figures but only genteel citizens moving gracefully beneath the arches, providing, in the words of the artist, 'an effect exceedingly picturesque' (figure 3.22).<sup>71</sup> The geometric precision of the arches here, however, is far from Gilpin's definition of the picturesque, showing again the disjunction

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<sup>66</sup> Malton 1792: I, 2, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid: 49.

<sup>68</sup> *Monthly Review*, July 1803: 305, 295.

<sup>69</sup> Maude 2013: 112-113.

<sup>70</sup> In both *View on Westminster Bridge* and *The Horse Guards*, Malton depicts a woman with a child seated on the pavement but gives no indication that either is a beggar.

<sup>71</sup> Malton 1792: I, 48.

between the practice of the picturesque and the theoretical account. Malton's idealised London certainly had no place for picturesque dirt and decay: the artist either removed the city's street life entirely or, if he did include it, rendered it in an aesthetically pleasing form.

The orderly spaces represented by Malton may have offered an ideal vision, but it was a vision that the authorities did hope to realise. Not only did new lighting and paving improve the physical landscape, but steps were also taken to enhance the social control of the spaces of the capital. This is evident in the newly created London squares where physical barriers were erected with the explicit aim of segregating the classes. The first London residential square had been Covent Garden, begun in 1630, but the following century saw the creation of many more which, unlike Covent Garden, had gardens in the centre and were designed as London residences for the elite. From the start, as Henry Lawrence has argued, there was a 'tension between private and public use of squares'. For the residents, 'the square gardens became their landscape prospect', their *rus in urbe* over which they claimed property rights.<sup>72</sup> However, the squares had often been created by enclosing what had formerly been urban common land; as in the countryside, enclosure thus became a denial of common rights of access. To enforce their rights, the London residents fenced in their gardens so creating a physical barrier that was also a class divide. In 1735, for example, an iron fence had been erected round the newly enclosed Lincolns Inn Fields following complaints that 'vagabonds, common beggars, and other disorderly persons resorted therein'.<sup>73</sup> An act of 1766 likewise provided for the centre of Berkeley Square to be 'fenced and inclosed', and 'preserved from Annoyances'.<sup>74</sup> In the London squares, social segregation was thus enshrined in law.

This class division is given graphic illustration in two prints of Fitzroy Square, that was built in the early 1790s. In Malton's *Tour*, a milkmaid can be seen outside the fenced-in garden: by contrast, a later scene from James Malcolm's *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London* (1807), depicts the gentlefolk safely enclosed within (figures 3.23, 3.24).<sup>75</sup> In the later print, vegetation has now grown up in the square garden, both protecting the two ladies from the street and providing the semblance of a rural retreat, with the lower orders kept out of sight. In the country landscapes, the gentry had maintained their physical distance from the mendicant poor by being represented on horseback, but traditional social values were still upheld in the act of almsgiving. In these

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<sup>72</sup> Lawrence 1993: 94, 104.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid: 99.

<sup>74</sup> *An Act* 1766: 3.

<sup>75</sup> Malcolm 1810: II, 361.

London scenes, however, legally enforced physical boundaries now separated the rich from the poor, with charity nowhere to be seen; issues of property rights and social control had taken precedence. As was noted in the main Introduction, Ogborn, writing about the paving of London's streets, has examined how urban improvement engendered conflicts between public and private interests.<sup>76</sup> From the evidence of the London squares, however, it is clear that improvement brought conflict in other areas too, notably between the interests of the rich and those of the poor.

Benevolence did not completely disappear from the city, however, although representations of almsgiving are few. In addition to the three print series discussed in this section, I have examined the illustrations of twenty-three guidebooks and histories covering London, published between 1760 and 1815, for the presence of a begging figure. Among these, I found only five prints unmistakably featuring the beggar, four of which depict an act of almsgiving. Significantly, three of these appear in illustrations of the Admiralty, a location that suggests that such figures are worthy naval veterans. *The Admiralty, the War Office, & the Treasury*, in the 1804 guidebook, *Modern London*, is one example where, among the crowd assembled to watch the soldiers on parade, two ladies can be seen giving alms to a peg leg beggar (figure 3.25).<sup>77</sup> The fourth scene of almsgiving, again featuring a veteran, is an illustration by Thomas Rowlandson, an artist whose work will be discussed in the following chapter; it appears in Rudolph's Ackermann's *The Microcosm of London* (1808-1810), to accompany an entry on Somerset House.<sup>78</sup> The very small number of such scenes is partly explained by the fact that, as the century progressed, individual almsgiving to the poor was becoming more problematic. However, it also suggests that drawing attention to London's beggar population would have been incompatible with the primary purpose of these publications which was, as Malton puts it, to represent only 'the exterior magnificence' of London and 'the opulence of its inhabitants'.

A surprising exception, however, is to be found in John Thomas Smith's *Ancient Topography of London*, published in 1815. As well as offering a picturesque survey of the city's historical buildings, this illustrated text also included the real-life figures of well-

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<sup>76</sup> Ogborn 1998: 114-115.

<sup>77</sup> Phillips 1804: 264. The two other illustrations of the Admiralty are in *London and its environs described* (Anon. 1761: I, 134), (a print also used in *A new and accurate History and Survey of London, Westminster, Southwark, and Places adjacent, etc* (Entick 1766: IV, 422)), and in *A New History of London* (Noorthouck 1773: 723).

<sup>78</sup> Rowlandson and Pugin 1904: III, Plate 73 (figure 4.18). The fifth beggar appears outside Westminster Abbey in William Maitland's *The History of London* (Maitland 1775: II, 1329).

known London beggars. An antiquarian and etcher who subsequently became Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, Smith had previously published *Remarks on Rural Scenery* (1797), in which he argued that 'the neglected fast-ruinating cottage' was a more picturesque subject than 'neatness and cleanliness'.<sup>79</sup> It is this understanding of the picturesque that informs his *Ancient Topography*. Smith's urban picturesque, unlike Malton's, features the decaying fabric of the past: crumbling stonework, vegetation growing out of walls, and crooked houses. In the section on Domestic Architecture, moreover, Smith both depicts and names some local mendicants: in Chancery Lane, for example, 'the man without legs crossing the street' is identified as the beggar, Samuel Horsey (figure 3.26).<sup>80</sup> The same scene shows the beggarwoman, Ann Siggs, also present in the illustration of Duke Street, West Smithfield; she has no claim to sympathy but is described as the 'malignant Ann Siggs [...] praise-worthy for nothing but her cleanliness, a rare quality in a beggar' (figure 3.27).<sup>81</sup> Such inclusion of named beggars in a topographical print series was without precedent.<sup>82</sup>

Unlike the traditional figure of the beggar in Grose's earlier representation of Malmesbury Cross, however, Smith's mendicants do not signify the virtue of charity, nor is there any suggestion that past values have been lost as the buildings have decayed. Rather Smith represents the state of London's streets as a social problem that calls for improvement. Lucy Peltz has argued that these prints should be read as a demand for 'sanitization and social regulation': figures such as Ann Siggs are 'synecdoches for the state of London's architectural fabric and the urgency of regeneration'.<sup>83</sup> In both Chancery Lane and Duke Street, the old houses may be picturesque with their crooked lines and scarred facades, but they are ill-designed for modern living. Smith condemns such buildings, writing of one house on Long Lane, Smithfield, that 'it would be difficult perhaps, to exhibit a better assemblage of combustible materials, than the wretched pile of buildings now before us'.<sup>84</sup> Whereas Rooker's *Views* had used an understated visual satire to suggest the need for improvement of London's spaces, Smith has provided textual commentary and been more explicit in his critique. The tension that exists in *Ancient Topography* between

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<sup>79</sup> Smith 1797: 9, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Smith 1815: 50.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid: 54.

<sup>82</sup> Smith had included begging figures in earlier topographical prints but as social types: see Little St Helen's and Leatherseller's Hall in *Antiquities of London and its Environs* (1791-1800: BM 1880,1113.3915, 1880,1113.3909), and the Duke de Sully's House in the Strand in *Antiquities of Westminster* (1807: BM 1880,0911.1272).

<sup>83</sup> Peltz 1999: 488, 489.

<sup>84</sup> Smith 1815: 68.

the picturesque aesthetic and the social commentary is the same tension Gilpin had experienced some forty years earlier between the social and moral, and the aesthetic. However, for Smith, such tension was to be addressed rather than evaded.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a change in the beggar's function in the topographical prints of London. In earlier prints, the figure had appeared as part of the social order, with acts of charity signifying society's moral values. Rooker's *Views*, however, challenged this vision of an orderly and benevolent city by showing the physical disorder of London's streets and, in the neglect of the begging figure, a moral disorder, too. In Smith's London scenes, produced some fifty years later, the beggar no longer functioned primarily as a moral signifier. Rather, she/he appeared as part of a decaying urban landscape in urgent need of change. Only in Malton's *Tour* was London represented as an orderly city whose modern and historic landmarks stood proudly side by side. For such a vision to be achieved, however, the beggar had to be removed from sight. The mendicant had now become a sign of disorder and, as such, had no place in the improved urban spaces of the metropolis.

#### Section Four: The beggar and the improved estate

The appropriation of the spaces of the landscape for improvement had resulted in the exclusion of the beggar. Underlying this appropriation were the issues of social control and the respective property rights of the rich and the poor, both of which issues are also evident in the creation of the improved estate which forms the subject of the following section. The focus will be on the work of the landscape gardener Humphry Repton who, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, undertook commissions to improve the grounds of country estates in order to create aesthetically pleasing and picturesque views. His work has been extensively studied, most notably by the cultural geographer Stephen Daniels, but not hitherto with a focus on the beggar as will be the case here. The visual evidence of such improvements will be used to make clear their consequences for the mendicant.

Prospect views of the country house and its estate in the first half of the eighteenth century had represented a hierarchical but paternalistic society similar to that evoked in the prospect views of London from the same period. The four volumes of *Britannia Illustrata* (1720-40), issued by David Mortier, offer many such views; typical is the illustration of the Newcastle estate of Sir William Blackett (figure 3.28).<sup>85</sup> It shows the close proximity of Sir

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<sup>85</sup> Kip and Knyff 1720, 1740.

William's seat to the town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the distinctive spire of St Nicholas' Cathedral clearly visible to the left. Nigel Everett has argued that such prospect views depict the country house within the landscape of public life; evidence of agriculture or horticulture suggests that the mansion is contributing to the public good.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the foreground of Blackett's estate shows not only a gentleman's carriage but also a hay wagon and a procession of pack horses. The industrious poor are seen here to have a place on Blackett's land.

In later views, however, the country estate, with its grounds now improved, appears as a more private world. Just as the residents of the London squares had asserted their property rights by excluding the poor from their garden landscapes, so later views of the country estates assert a similar claim to exclusive ownership. This shift from a public to a private view can be seen in Repton's designs for the improvement of the Wentworth Woodhouse estate in South Yorkshire, home to the Whig politician, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam.<sup>87</sup> In 1790 the Earl commissioned Repton to remodel the grounds; the landscape gardener produced one of his characteristic designs in which an overlay can be lifted so that the views before and after improvement can be compared (figures 3.29, 3.30). The view before Repton's work shows an area to the south east of the house where deer roam the park while to the right, men are seen at work on a shallow hill.<sup>88</sup> In the foreground the Earl, his wife and son, are shown with a group of women and children and men who have paused in their work. One man doffs his cap to the Earl who is offering him money which Patrick Eyres suggests is payment for his labours.<sup>89</sup> The scene clearly demonstrates not only the grandeur of the landowner's estate but also his paternal relationship with his men.

When the overlay is lifted, however, a very different, improved view appears. What Repton proposes at Wentworth is to keep the hill but to plant trees to raise its profile. His aim here is aesthetic: to 'form a foreground, and lead the eye' to the separate vistas, now connected in 'one general harmony'.<sup>90</sup> The deer still graze in the park and a carriage and horses can be seen on the drive at the far edge, but all evidence of manual labour has been removed; the Earl's park now appears a wholly private domain. Repton uses the term 'appropriation' for such a view, defining it as 'that sort of command over the Landscape,

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<sup>86</sup> Everett 1994: 52.

<sup>87</sup> The illustrated Red Book for Wentworth Woodhouse has been lost; however, the two views of the estate before and after improvement are included in Repton's *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1805: between pages 14 and 15).

<sup>88</sup> This earlier work to improve the prospect was stopped by Repton for aesthetic reasons. (Repton 1805: 13-14)

<sup>89</sup> Eyres 2014: 92.

<sup>90</sup> Repton 1805: 14-15.



visible from the windows, which denotes it to be private property', offering 'the *exclusive right* of enjoyment, with the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure'.<sup>91</sup> Repton's 'appropriation' is a controlling gaze, asserting property rights by claiming the foreground for itself and keeping the world of economic activity hidden from sight. In such a view, interaction among the social classes is lost.

The creation of such parks could lead to displacement of the poor. Emparkment might involve not only appropriating the space of common land but also displacing tenants who could then become the vagrant figures seen in Gainsborough's landscapes or, migrating to the city, the beggars in Rooker's urban scenes. Unlike enclosure, the creation of the landscape park could make no claim to benefit the public good by increasing productivity; rather its sole purpose was perceived to be to display the wealth and status of the landowner, with no regard for the social consequences. Many shared the criticism of emparkment made in Goldsmith's poem, seeing it as an abdication of the landowner's paternalistic responsibilities.<sup>92</sup> These duties were made clear by the clergyman Thomas Gisborne; writing in 1794, he advises landowners to have regard 'to the rules of equity and benevolence' and warns them not to be among those seen 'depopulating the country, and turning multitudes of industrious poor adrift, by converting half a parish into an immense sheepwalk'.<sup>93</sup> It is significant that the sentimental scene in *The Deserted Village* in which an evicted family leave their home proved a popular subject for artists, its subject matter clearly striking a chord with the public. At least eight artists illustrated the scene between 1787 and 1800, among them Francis Wheatley who produced his version for Thomas Macklin's Poets' Gallery (figure 3.31). However, the disquiet expressed in the last decades of the eighteenth century appears to have had little effect; the creation of landscaped parks continued.

Representations of these parks make clear their social exclusion since if they were to be a private domain, access had to be strictly controlled. To this end, high walls were built to enclose estates, serving the same purpose as the railings in the London squares. One such wall is depicted in a vignette by the wood engraver Thomas Bewick in his *A General History of Quadrupeds*, published in 1790 (figure 3.32). Outside the boundary wall, two blind beggars walk along the road, playing their fiddles, and led by a young boy who holds out his cap for alms. A sign has been erected by the estate owner that reads 'Steel T',

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<sup>91</sup> Repton 1816: 233.

<sup>92</sup> Everett 1994: 62ff.

<sup>93</sup> Gisborne 1794: 579, 580.

referring to the 'steel-traps' that were set to catch unlawful intruders. A similar notice is shown on a title-page, *Forest Scenery*, designed by William Delamotte (1806: figure 3.33). No evidence of such a book survives but the forbidding notice above the pictured estate wall warns: 'TAKE NOTICE Steel Traps are Set in these Woods'. The writer and cleric Vicesimus Knox railed against such signs of aristocratic tyranny in *The Spirit of Despotism* (1795), complaining that the 'poor labourer' and his family were 'threatened with prosecution' if they exercised their former common right to 'pick up sticks in the park'. Any trespasser was faced with 'MAN traps and spring guns'.<sup>94</sup> It is the same critique that Bewick had made: the wealthy have shut their gates on the poor and needy. Daniels has noted how the iconography of high walls and stern notices, as signifiers of social division, would become a conventional sign of 'patrician delinquency' in the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> Here again, the beggar is among those excluded.

Although, as David Worrall has observed, 'the Picturesque landscaped park' became 'the target of a continued radical debate about land-use', Bewick's social critique was not in fact a radical one. He did not share the extreme views of his friend, Thomas Spence, also a native of Newcastle, who favoured the total abolition of private property and the return of the land to local parish control.<sup>96</sup> Rather, Bewick's position was similar to the message implicit in Gainsborough's two landscapes: improvement had led to a decline in paternalism, with the gentry abdicating their responsibilities to the poor in the interests of material gain. In his *Memoir*, Bewick claims that 'the Gentry whirled about in aristocratic pomposity', and 'forgot what their demeanour & good, kind, behaviour, used to be': now they looked on 'those of inferiour [*sic*] stations in life [...] like dirt'. What he condemned was the loss of the sense that all were 'members of the same community'.<sup>97</sup>

Repton himself was not unaware of the potential social consequences of emparkment. Daniels has argued that, towards the end of his life, he became increasingly concerned about the landowners' practice of preventing private access to their parks.<sup>98</sup> Repton gave visual expression to his critique in two illustrations for the chapter, 'Concerning Improvement', in his late work, *Fragments* (1816: figure 3.34). One shows a country road passing by the estate of a paternalist landowner where a stile suggests there is public access to the park and a bench has been provided for the villagers. By contrast, the scene after

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<sup>94</sup> Knox 1795: 99.

<sup>95</sup> Daniels 1999: 54.

<sup>96</sup> Worrall 1994: 243; Uglow 2006: 84; Bain 1979: 52.

<sup>97</sup> Bain 1979: 138, 171.

<sup>98</sup> Daniels 1999: 52.

improvement depicts the changes wrought by a new landowner. To assert his exclusive ownership, he has erected a high fence and a forbidding line of conifers while a sign warns of the traps that await the trespasser; the common land to the right has been enclosed and given over to arable farming. The figure of a traveller, possibly a vagrant, making his way along the road reminds the reader of those displaced by emparkment. Repton laments that the landowner is now only concerned with profit: 'money supersedes every other consideration'.<sup>99</sup> A scene of social harmony has been replaced by one of social exclusion.

Repton's social ideals are evident elsewhere in his writing. Daniels has drawn attention to his written advocacy of a benevolent style of estate management in the Red Book for the Sheringham estate in Norfolk: here, Repton criticises those mansions where 'lame and blind beggars' are offered no relief.<sup>100</sup> Daniels further notes, however, that Repton's designs for the house are 'a brief not so much for the exercise as for the display of paternalism': although specific days were designated for the destitute to come to the house for food, the building was designed so that the family would not meet them.<sup>101</sup> Repton faced a constant tension between his social ideals and the demands both of those clients who wanted only to display their wealth and power, and of his own desire to create 'beauty' which was for him 'the chief object of modern improvement'.<sup>102</sup> It was a tension that he was unable to resolve.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Repton's designs for the improvement of his own property at Hare Street, in Essex (1816: figures 3.35, 3.36). These two views, before and after improvement, have been the subject of extensive analysis by Daniels, but it is the figure of the beggar that is here of particular significance.<sup>103</sup> In the unimproved view, the spectator looks out at a busy village street where coaches pass, a butcher's shop displays its joints of meat, and geese flock on the common. Leaning on the fence that borders Repton's property is an old peg-leg beggar, missing an eye and an arm, confronting the viewer. Most likely one of the veterans demobilised at the end of the French wars in 1815, he is here a needy and disturbing presence. In the improved view, however, he has vanished; Repton has appropriated the common to extend his garden, the geese have gone, and the butcher's shop has been hidden from view. He justifies his actions on aesthetic grounds: 'by this *Appropriation* of twenty-five yards of Garden, I have obtained a frame to my Landscape'.<sup>104</sup> The beggar may, of course, have been offered relief and so moved on, but

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<sup>99</sup> Repton 1816: 192.

<sup>100</sup> Daniels 1982: 136; Repton 1816: 204.

<sup>101</sup> Daniels 1982: 137.

<sup>102</sup> Repton 1794: 7.

<sup>103</sup> Daniels 1982, 1999.

<sup>104</sup> Repton 1816: 235.

the impression remains that this signifier of poverty has been removed in the interests of the 'beauty' of the improved view. Just as Gilpin had removed the beggar from his picturesque view of Tintern, and Malton from his picturesque tour of London, so Repton removes the figure from his picturesque, improved landscape. For all his professed social ideals, Repton's Hare Street was to be as exclusive as his clients' estates and as ruthless in appropriating the common land. It certainly offered no space to the beggar.

Repton's improvement of his property epitomises on a small scale the social consequences of emparkment. The appropriation of common land in the interests of both aesthetic beauty and a display of wealth could lead to displacement of the poor and a consequent rise in the vagrant and begging population. Moreover, landowners, anxious to assert their property rights, barred access to their estates and so denied the poor the common rights formerly associated with the land. The physical barriers between the classes were read by contemporaries as a sign of the decline of social bonds, with the beggar a visual signifier of the suffering of the poor.

### Conclusion

Finding a place for the beggar in visual representations of the landscape, whether rural or urban, proved problematic. The male vagrant in the countryside was perceived by the elite as an idle and menacing figure and very few artists chose to represent him. Although the less threatening female vagrant did feature in two of Gainsborough's landscapes, these were private commissions created with the patron in mind. Anxiety surrounding vagrancy increased in the last two decades of the century: in response, the small number of images of rural encounters between elite figures and the vagrant that date from these years assert social hierarchy and control. In scenes of benevolence, mounted gentry give alms to the deferential members of the mendicant poor, clearly marked as deserving.

Picturesque theorists addressed the problematic nature of the beggar by arguing that a figure who prompted only disgust and disapproval could, in a landscape painting, become instead a purely decorative object of picturesque charm. In practice, however, it proved impossible to dissociate the begging figure from the surrounding moral and social issues. At Tintern, Gilpin's unease at the beggar's indolence led him to remove the figure from his sketches, while Price's advocacy of the beggar as a suitable subject for the picturesque went unheeded. Although the figure does feature in the topographical picturesque landscapes of Girtin and Rooker, their reference is to the traditional iconography of the

beggar as a signifier of the need for charity; the mendicant is not here a decorative object but a trope for benevolence. It was because beggars could not be separated from their moral signifying functions, whether representing idleness or the need for alms, that they failed to become 'the staple of picturesque staffage'.

An alternative solution to the problem of representing the beggar was to exclude this type of figure from the landscape altogether. In the guidebooks that celebrated London's past and present, the tourist was spared the connotations of poverty and squalor that the mendicant might bring. Malton was not alone in removing the figure from his illustrations; even the acts of benevolence that had featured in the earlier prospect views of London were now represented only infrequently. The beggar was not only excluded from the represented landscape but from the physical spaces of the improved metropolis as well. By barring the mendicant from the London squares, the wealthy residents asserted their property rights and assumed control over these urban spaces. They followed the same practice at their country estates where common land was taken on a larger scale and whole parks fenced in; here again the wealthy landowners appropriated the view to exclude the poor. The beggar removed by Repton from his improved cottage garden was a signifier of the poverty which the privileged viewer chose to ignore.

A few artists, however, did include the beggar in their landscapes in order to highlight these evident social problems. The increasing separation of rich and poor, and the absence of benevolence, were represented in the city by Rooker and in the countryside by Bewick, whose satirical vignette castigated the irresponsible landowner. Illustrations to *The Deserted Village* highlighted the displacement that both enclosure and emparkment could bring. Smith, however, used the beggar's presence not to critique weakening social bonds but to emphasise the need to attend not only to the physical fabric of the city but to the social problem of mendicity as well.

The beggar's absence from the spaces of the landscape speaks of wider changes in British society. Improvement in both the city and the countryside resulted in changing property relations where the rights assumed by the rich diminished those of the poor. Scenes of social interaction in landscape paintings were rare: where the traditional iconography of almsgiving was represented, it was linked to the past either by physical location or by pictorial reference. The infrequency of such scenes suggests not only the loss of traditional social values but also the realisation that individual acts of benevolence could never be the solution to poverty. More radical reforms were needed, such as those

called for by Smith. Although the elite might choose to exclude the beggar from their view, the problems raised by the figure could not so easily be ignored.

## Chapter Four

### Comedy, satire and the beggar

#### Introduction

Traditionally, the figure of the beggar had invited one of two responses. Represented as one of the deserving poor, their suffering invited sympathy, but represented as a wily rogue, the mendicant had prompted only laughter. In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, cultural changes saw the new moral values associated with sentimentalism make laughter at the expense of the vulnerable reprehensible. At the same time, the relationship between rich and poor became less clear as belief in a divinely ordained social hierarchy declined, while political anxieties about vagrancy saw the beggar become a more threatening figure. It would seem likely that the representation of the beggar as a comic figure was made problematic as a result of these cultural, social and political developments. This chapter aims to establish whether this was indeed the case by investigating the comic scenes in the graphic media in which the beggar made an appearance. A key figure in this investigation will be Thomas Rowlandson who introduced the beggar into his satires more than any other graphic artist of the time. This chapter represents a contribution to the literature on this artist who has been neglected by comparison to his fellow satirist, James Gillray.<sup>1</sup>

Although the scholarship on eighteenth-century humour has largely had a literary focus, there have been important art-historical studies. The graphic satire of the first half of the century has been explored by Mark Hallett who, in *The Spectacle of Difference* (1999), demonstrates the dialectical relationship between graphic satire and polite art. In its exposure of vice and representation of scenes of delinquent London life, early satire questions the ordered society represented in polite art while simultaneously upholding polite ideals in its condemnation of vice. My investigation will explore whether or not the figure of the beggar continued to be depicted as part of delinquent London life, as was occasionally the case in the age of Hogarth.<sup>2</sup> The second half of the century saw a

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<sup>1</sup> Recent works on Rowlandson are a biography (Payne and Payne 2010) and two exhibition catalogues (Phagan, Gatrell and Rauser 2011; Heard 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Hallett discusses two prints by Hogarth, *Morning* and *Gin Lane*, which associate the beggar with delinquent London life.

considerable increase in the production of satirical prints, especially after 1760; prominently displayed in London printshop windows, they offered a critical commentary on contemporary political and social issues. These later prints are discussed by Diana Donald in her study *The Age of Caricature* (1996); of relevance here is her identification of the changing perceptions of what constituted the comic. Ugliness came to be viewed as comical rather than as evidence of a moral defect, while misfortune and extreme vice were no longer seen as sources of humour. I will explore whether similar shifts can be discerned in representations of the beggar in satirical prints, a topic that neither Hallett nor Donald addresses in any detail.

The first section of this chapter examines how graphic artists such as Rowlandson responded to the social and cultural developments of the eighteenth century in their representations of the London beggar in prints whose aim was social satire. The following section considers the illustrations of the comic beggar in the novels of Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne. Here I address the problems that arose for artists as they negotiated the cultural changes that had taken place since the mid-century when the picaresque novels of Fielding and Smollett were published. Although Sterne's novels were in tune with the later sentimental mode, artists struggled to represent his nuanced comedy in visual terms. The third section offers a detailed analysis of Rowlandson's representations of the beggar in his graphic social satires. Here I challenge the recent claim made by both Vic Gatrell and Amelia Rauser that Rowlandson's work is amoral, arguing instead that the satires under discussion offer a moral critique of the effects of commercialisation on London society.<sup>3</sup> The chapter concludes with an investigation into the representation of the beggar in the political satire of the period as the only context in which the comic beggar consistently appeared in a negative light. Using the figure of the fraudulent beggar as a disguise for leading public figures, satirists were able to reveal the anxiety and hostility aroused by the beggar which was suppressed in other visual contexts. The chapter as a whole aims to show how changing social, cultural and political beliefs in the eighteenth century informed developments in the visual representation of the comic beggar and led to artists finding new functions for the figure.

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<sup>3</sup> Gatrell 2011: 29; Rauser 2011: 45.



### Section One: The London beggar in social satire from Hogarth to Rowlandson

In the second half of the eighteenth century satirists, such as Rowlandson, inherited an iconography of the comic beggar from the earlier work of Hogarth. In the interim, however, the growing emphasis on sentimentalism and politeness had seen a change in perceptions of what constituted the comic. Of significance for images of the beggar, theorists now argued that neither vice nor misfortune were appropriate targets for ridicule. Moreover, the London audience for the satirical prints had new expectations; Gatrell has argued that the demand was for images 'that mirrored rather than moralized about their lives and surroundings'.<sup>4</sup> Both the social make-up of this audience and the validity of Gatrell's claim will be investigated. The main aim of the following section will be to demonstrate how these various cultural and social changes informed representations of the comic beggar in the graphic social satire of the last decades of the century. The visual material will be drawn both from the early satirical prints of Hogarth and the work of later artists.

The benign, non-satirical comedy of Hogarth's beggars in *Industry and Idleness* was addressed in an earlier chapter. However, two other satires by the artist depict the beggar as a more delinquent figure. In his print, *Morning*, part of *The Four Times of Day* sequence, Hogarth depicts a scene in Covent Garden, an area then associated with taverns and brothels (1738: figure 4.1). An elderly but fashionably dressed spinster is seen on her way to church, having to pass a group of low-life figures outside Tom King's infamous coffee house; they include men fighting, two rakes fondling young market girls and some older market women gathered round a fire, one of whom begs from the spinster. David Dabydeen has suggested that the beggarwoman is black; he finds her a poignant figure, conveying 'the painfulness of the daily existence of the London poor'.<sup>5</sup> Sara Schotland similarly reads her as a needy black beggarwoman, deserving of charity.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the woman's exaggerated and stereotypical facial features exemplify the 'lowness' that Temi Odumosu finds in eighteenth-century caricatures of the black; she is clearly part of the scene of delinquency that surrounds her.<sup>7</sup> As Dabydeen argues, her identity for contemporaries as a perceived pagan other is crucial to her function as a satirical device that exposes the supposed white superiority and Christian piety of the old maid as a sham.

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<sup>4</sup> Gatrell 2013: xxvi.

<sup>5</sup> Dabydeen 1985: 121.

<sup>6</sup> Schotland 2009: 158.

<sup>7</sup> Odumosu 2017: 29.

As a slightly later commentator John Trusler would note, her regular attendance at church is 'merely to attract the notice' of her neighbours.<sup>8</sup> Certainly she shows no charity either to the beggarwoman or to her shivering servant but fixes her attention on the amorous couples. In Hogarth's print, the classes are clearly segregated with the beggarwoman forming part of London's disorderly low life.<sup>9</sup>

In the artist's darkly satirical *Gin Lane*, the beggar has a more overtly didactic function (1751: figure 4.2). Set in London's St Giles's, an area notorious both for its vice and its beggars, Hogarth here represents the extreme social breakdown caused by gin-drinking as a mother lets her baby fall to its likely death.<sup>10</sup> In the background, a group of crippled men can be seen emerging from a distiller's, fighting among themselves. They appear to have no need for the crutches they brandish, suggesting that their disability is feigned, and that they are none other than the notorious beggars of St Giles's. Such fraudulent rogue beggars had traditionally been objects of satire; here they represent the undeserving male beggar in his most threatening guise, inviting the viewer's moral condemnation. In a detailed analysis of this image, Hallett argues that Hogarth has here created an alternative narrative to the more decorous London scenes of urban almsgiving.<sup>11</sup> In the low-life areas of Covent Garden and St Giles's there is no place for the deserving beggars that had featured in the *Industry and Idleness* print.

In none of the social satires produced in the later years of the century, however, does the beggar appear as a similarly delinquent figure and, as such, the object of moral critique. To understand why this was so it is necessary to consider how ideas about the sources of comedy had changed over the course of the century. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes had associated laughter with ridicule of the deformed and the weak which gave rise to a sense of superiority.<sup>12</sup> However, a shift away from this idea of laughter as scornful ridicule towards a laughter of sympathy subsequently took place, according to Ronald Paulson, who traces its origins to Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays in the early years of the eighteenth century. Paulson considers the catalyst for this shift to have been Cervantes' novel, *Don Quixote*, which was highly popular in England by 1700; in this work, the comedy arose not from ridicule of the eccentric knight but from the incongruous

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<sup>8</sup> Trusler 1768: 154.

<sup>9</sup> The presence of black beggars in London is discussed further in Chapter 5.

<sup>10</sup> The area would later be described as a place where 'wretchedness, poverty, villainy smiles' and where 'beggars, whores, gamblers, pickpockets meet'. (*Wit's Magazine*, 1784-5: 473)

<sup>11</sup> Hallett 1999: 219.

<sup>12</sup> Paulson 1998: 20-21.

juxtaposition of Quixote's idealism and the realism of his squire, Sancho Panza.<sup>13</sup> Later theorists would develop this idea of incongruity; in his essay, *On laughter, and ludicrous composition* (1764), James Beattie, a Scottish poet and moral philosopher, argued that incongruity was the chief source of comedy. Laughter, he maintained, arose from the perceived tension between the apparently disparate.<sup>14</sup> As with Beattie's work, most theorists of the time wrote about humour with specific reference to literature with the result that the visual dimension to the debates about humour has, as Donald has noted, been little discussed.<sup>15</sup> However, the shift away from laughter as an expression of contempt for the weak to a gentler laughter of sympathy would have important consequences for the representation of the beggar in graphic social satire.

Most significantly, theorists now restricted the subject matter considered appropriate for comedy. In 1753, the artist Allan Ramsay argued that poverty, far from being the object of ridicule and laughter, was 'to all, but the unfeeling', a prompt to compassion.<sup>16</sup> Francis Grose, in a rare discussion of comic painting in 1788, agreed: genuine suffering could never be a cause for laughter.<sup>17</sup> Nor, as Beattie argued, could vice ever be comic, although 'follies, and vices of less enormity' might 'be exhibited in very laughable colours'.<sup>18</sup> If sympathy was the proper response to poverty and suffering, then the unsympathetic attitude towards the often grotesque beggar, as in the prints of Hogarth, could no longer be sustained. Nor, if wickedness is never laughable, could the delinquent mendicant have any place in social satire. Graphic artists would need to find ways to represent the beggar, a necessarily impoverished figure and often disabled, without disrupting the comic mood.

The shift in comic theory cannot be seen in isolation from parallel social and cultural developments. Donald has argued that later theorists were attempting to accommodate comedy to 'the changing sensibilities of the time'.<sup>19</sup> Sentimentalism, with its emphasis on shared humanity and on fellow feeling as the basis for social relations, required that the viewer respond with compassion, not contempt, to the vulnerable in society. By contrast, the ideal of politeness that developed in the eighteenth century saw social relations governed less by feelings than by a code of conduct designed to regulate social behaviour. Politeness demanded moderation and a mutual tolerance rather than a display of sympathy;

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid: xiv, xi, xii.

<sup>14</sup> Beattie 1776: 602.

<sup>15</sup> Donald 1996: 31.

<sup>16</sup> Ramsay 1753: 72-73.

<sup>17</sup> Grose 1788: 22-23.

<sup>18</sup> Beattie 1776: 659-660.

<sup>19</sup> Donald 1996: 31.

however, like sentimentalism, it urged consideration for the weak. Beattie argued that 'no man, who has any pretensions to good manners' or 'to common humanity' would make a butt of the weak and defenceless.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, politeness became associated with gentility; with the emergence of a middle class, an increasingly wide section of society now aspired to the polite ideal that would identify them as gentlemen and gentlewomen regardless of their birth.<sup>21</sup> Donald associates this wider diffusion of gentility and the emphasis on polite conduct with the emergence of a genre of satirical prints in the 1780s in which the social classes now interact in a gentle comedy of manners.<sup>22</sup> This type of satire stood in contrast to the clearly defined social hierarchy and moral condemnation of earlier satires such as those of Hogarth.

If, however, this new comedy of manners clearly represents a response to the changing tastes of the audience for satirical prints, the composition of this audience has been the subject of debate. Gatrell argues that the print market had expanded since the time of Hogarth to include more of the middle class.<sup>23</sup> More recently, however, James Baker has suggested that images of print shop windows with their socially diverse spectators give a false idea of the breadth of this audience, arguing that graphic satire was never a popular medium.<sup>24</sup> David Taylor has argued further that satirical prints were expensive commodities that invited 'the educated gaze'.<sup>25</sup> In short, it would seem that the audience remained an elite although one whose tastes were now for a less censorious satire. Furthermore, Gatrell's argument that the demand was for prints that would entertain rather than moralise, leading to a 'flight from didacticism', is overstated.<sup>26</sup> Even the representation of mere folly could, so Beattie had argued, prompt the viewer 'both to *laugh at* and to *despise* them'. In this way, the ridicule of folly in comedies of manners could be 'an instrument of moral culture', thereby accommodating satire within a polite society.<sup>27</sup> Gatrell further asserts that later satirists produced 'a non-judgemental vision of London'; however, if folly invites ridicule, the viewer inevitably judges the perpetrator from a position of superiority.<sup>28</sup> For an elite audience, didacticism continued to be an important function of the satirical print.

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<sup>20</sup> Beattie 1776: 593.

<sup>21</sup> Brewer 1997: 100; Klein 2002: 876.

<sup>22</sup> Donald 1996: 94.

<sup>23</sup> Gatrell 2006: 40.

<sup>24</sup> Baker 2017: 5.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor 2018: 24.

<sup>26</sup> Gatrell 2006: 40.

<sup>27</sup> Beattie 1776: 660-661.

<sup>28</sup> Gatrell 2006: 40.

In the later satirical prints, however, it is never the beggar who is the object of ridicule or moral judgement. Two contrasting commentaries on Hogarth's *Morning* make clear how by the late eighteenth century, the beggar of social satire no longer prompted a negative response. Writing in 1768, Trusler reads Hogarth's image as a moral satire; he makes no specific reference to the beggarwoman but comments disapprovingly of the coffee house and its clientele that it was 'a noted night-house, frequented by Irish gamesters, and rakes of the town'.<sup>29</sup> A different response to the scene can be discerned after the 1780s, when a renewed interest in the artist created an active market for his prints.<sup>30</sup> John Ireland, writing in 1793, still condemns 'the reeling sons of Riot' who had spent the night in 'senseless revelry', but now finds the beggarwoman to be an object of pathos who functions to arouse not censure but sympathy:

Poor, – trembling, – old, – her suit the beggar plies;

But *frozen chastity* the little boon denies.<sup>31</sup>

In short, reading Hogarth's image against the grain, Ireland does not view the beggar as other but responds with sympathy and a sense of shared humanity.

The move in social satire away from Hogarth's largely unsympathetic and at times censorious representations of the beggar had already begun by the 1770s, as can be seen from the anti-clerical satire discussed in Chapter One. However, the shift is most obvious in the early work of Rowlandson. His first representation of a begging figure is in *Charity covereth a multitude of sins*, although in depicting the beggar as a purely comic character, this print remains unusual among the satires produced at the end of the century (1781: figure 4.3). Rowlandson's print shows a young officer with one hand on the knocker of a brothel, dropping a coin into the hat of a lame, begging sailor, all the while gazing intently at two prostitutes at the upstairs window. The title makes ironic use of a biblical text since the officer's almsgiving is not a charitable impulse but serves simply to offset the lustful act he is about to commit. However, the attractive young girls and the youthful energy of the parties involved suggest sexual appetite to be a healthy, natural instinct rather than a potentially mortal sin. Unusually for the artist, the lame sailor here has no moral function and may even be a rogue since his agility belies his apparent lameness. However, such incongruity invites not moral condemnation but only laughter. Furthermore, this comic beggar no longer appears in the low-life areas of London but rather in the fashionable

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<sup>29</sup> Trusler 1768: 155.

<sup>30</sup> O'Connell 1997: 58.

<sup>31</sup> Ireland 1793: I, 130.

district of St James's, as the street sign, 'Cleveland Row', makes clear. Rowlandson's light-hearted treatment of this beggar, as well as of the officer's lust, is very far from Hogarth's moralising satire.

Very few other artists, however, would introduce the beggar into their comedies of manners in the 1780s and beyond, something that tends to suggest that the figure proved as problematic in this as in other genres. The beggar's presence in an image would normally introduce a moral dimension; however, as noted above, delinquent figures had no place in a gentler social satire. In order to accommodate the beggar's moral function in these comedies of manners, graphic artists now used the figure not as the target of the satire but instead as an instrument of critique, as in the earlier anti-clerical prints. In satirical scenes where alms were denied, the presence of the beggar functioned to highlight the lack of charity among members of fashionable society. However, in such scenes the critique was never the main object of the satire but merely implied.

A motif repeated in three later social satires provides an example of this new role. It consists of a young beggar boy infiltrating the crowds at London sites of public assembly where the different social groups mingle in a comedy of manners. As a mere child, this beggar offers no threat and indeed often remains scarcely visible; in each image, however, the boy's plea for charity is ignored. Rowlandson introduced this figure in *Skaters on the Serpentine*, a watercolour exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784, where the beggar boy appears on the right; however, no print of this composition exists (figure 4.4).<sup>32</sup> A beggar boy also appears in Julius Caesar Ibbetson's *Winter Amusement* (1787), another scene of skaters on the Serpentine in Hyde Park, where the boy is more visible but the scene less comic (figure 4.5). A spurned young beggar similarly features in Henry Bunbury's *St James's Park* (1783), this time being threatened with a whip (figure 4.6). In each case, however, the beggar boy remains a peripheral figure in a scene whose primary function is to entertain. Nevertheless, his presence acts as a reminder that genteel manners could be little more than a social veneer rather than a commitment to humanitarian values. Such a reminder would feature more prominently in the social satire produced by Rowlandson in the 1790s and beyond.

In conclusion, the years that separated Hogarth from Rowlandson saw significant changes in the representation of the beggar in social satire. With the rise of sentimentalism, the poor were now to be regarded with compassion as fellow human beings. The eighteenth-century ideal of politeness also prompted greater consideration for the weak,

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<sup>32</sup> Exhibited as *The Serpentine River*, no. 511.

although in adherence to a code of conduct that signified social superiority rather than as a sign of spontaneous fellow feeling. With the emergence of a middle class, growing numbers now aspired to the refined behaviour which characterised both sentimentalism and politeness and required that the vulnerable in society no longer be treated with contempt. This shift in attitude posed problems for the representation of the beggar in social satire. Rather than being the target of moral condemnation or cruel ridicule, the figure instead functioned in the later satirical prints to unmask the uncharitable. Mingling with the crowds in the more fashionable areas of London, the boy beggar was no longer the delinquent other but part of a light-hearted comic scene.

### Section Two: Illustrations of the comic beggar of literature

Changing models of comedy in the eighteenth century created problems for the artists who illustrated the comic beggar of literary texts. Such mid-century fiction as the picaresque novels of Fielding and Smollett had displayed a robust and even cruel comedy; however, by the time illustrated books became more common in the 1770s, such humour was considered inhumane.<sup>33</sup> The illustrators of these texts had therefore to negotiate the discrepancy between their subject matter and the tastes of later years. Even the sentimental novels of Sterne, which were more in tune with the dominant culture, proved problematic; artists struggled to realise his nuanced humour in visual terms. This section will examine illustrations of the comic beggar of literature to demonstrate how political, social and cultural developments informed the representation of the figure.<sup>34</sup>

The beggar featured in comic texts throughout the eighteenth century as she/he also did in the rogue literature and ballad operas discussed in Chapter One. However, the beggar also appeared in jestbooks, collections of jokes that had been popular since the early years of the century. At a rough estimate, based on the evidence of some sixty jest books produced after 1760, about one in ten of these jokes centred on witty rejoinders made by quick-thinking beggars to their social superiors. However, a more disturbing tendency in these texts has been revealed by Simon Dickie who identifies it as disability or deformity humour.<sup>35</sup> Such humour arises from practical jokes played on paupers, the blind and the

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<sup>33</sup> Illustrated works of imaginative literature only began to appear 'in any numbers' in the last quarter of the century. (Brewer 1997: 462)

<sup>34</sup> John Kitchingman's illustration of the comic beggar in *A Man of Feeling* is not included here, having been discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>35</sup> Dickie 2014: 45ff.

lame, all of whom were likely to be beggars. Since the jestbooks retained their popularity until well into the nineteenth century, the presence of such cruel humour in their pages would suggest that a fundamentally hostile attitude to the poor persisted among the upper and middle social groups who made up most of their audience. Nor was this audience exclusively male: Dickie notes that the contents of, for example, *The Female Jester*, did not differ from other jestbooks.<sup>36</sup> Not only does this vein of humour demonstrate that not everyone subscribed to the ideal of politeness, it also reveals a traditionally hierarchical view of social difference rather than an enlightened belief in shared humanity.

Few of the jestbooks were illustrated other than with simple woodcuts or frontispieces showing gentlemen laughing together. Verbal wit does not translate into visual imagery: the only illustration of a beggar's witty rejoinder that I have identified is one produced by Rowlandson for *The Wit's Magazine* (1818: figure 4.7). When a gouty Irishman refuses a beggarwoman's plea for charity, she retorts, 'Ah, please your honour's honour, I wish your heart were as tender as your toes.'<sup>37</sup> Although Rowlandson's illustration can satirise the Irishman's uncharitableness by ridiculing his gross figure, it cannot convey the beggarwoman's witty pun. The disability humour of the jestbooks might seem more suited to visual representation; however, I have found no illustrations of jokes played on innocent beggars. Even among the jestbooks I have examined, there is only one example of a trick perpetrated on a disabled figure, here a blind man, who is clearly identifiable as a beggar.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, theorists registered a growing unease about representing the disabled as the butt of humour. Beattie argued that although from a comic perspective a wooden leg might indeed appear 'ludicrous', from a humanitarian point of view it was otherwise. 'He who forgets humanity so far, as to smile at such a memorial of misfortune in a living person, will be blamed by every good man.'<sup>39</sup> The emphasis on consideration for the weak, common to both sentimentalism and politeness, made it unacceptable to mock the disabled. The cruel jokes of the jestbooks may have been countenanced only because, as Dickie suggests, they are distanced by verbal framing.<sup>40</sup> However, even if the comic perspective towards disability persisted in these texts, it did not find visual representation.

The robust and often cruel humour of the jestbooks also featured in earlier novels in the picaresque tradition. Of particular relevance are Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and

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<sup>36</sup> Dickie 2014: 23.

<sup>37</sup> *Wit's Magazine* I, 1818: I, 147.

<sup>38</sup> *Coffee-House Jest*s (Anon. 1733: 123); repeated in *Ben Johnson's Jest*s. (Anon. 1789: 42, and other editions)

<sup>39</sup> Beattie 1776: 665.

<sup>40</sup> Dickie 2014: 40.



Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), both of which include comic episodes featuring a beggar. The picaresque genre, which had originated in sixteenth-century Spain, features the life of a picaro, a low-born social outcast who lives by his wits with scant respect for the law.<sup>41</sup> His adventures, offering a satirical commentary on contemporary life, frequently involve the knockabout humour and laughter at the deformed that were staple ingredients of the jestbooks. The novels of both Fielding and Smollett chart the adventures of protagonists who do at times indulge in such behaviour; *Peregrine*, for example, trips up a man with a wooden leg. However, neither novel fully meets the criteria for the picaresque since both introduce sentiment as well as comedy: *Peregrine* weeps at his uncle's deathbed while both he and Tom give alms to the poor. Both novels remained popular; they were published in sixpenny parts by Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine* in the 1780s, and as late as 1800 could be found abridged in chapbook versions, thus reaching a wide audience.<sup>42</sup> As is evident with the jestbooks, the taste for rough comedy persisted.

Unlike the jestbooks, however, several later editions of these novels had illustrations: significantly these included the scenes in which the heroes encounter beggars. As Christina Ionescu has observed, recent studies of eighteenth-century book illustrations have emphasised the importance of situating an artist's interpretation of a text in its historical moment, insofar as the image will be informed by the iconographies prevalent at the time.<sup>43</sup> A survey of the illustrations of the beggar episodes in both *Tom Jones* and *Peregrine Pickle* can provide evidence to support this argument. The illustrations were produced between 1769 and 1810, a period which saw the development of the sentimental iconography of the beggar. Illustrators therefore faced the problem of reconciling the picaresque comedy of the literary texts with the later dominance of the sentimental mode.

The comic beggar appears in *Tom Jones* in an episode in which Tom and his companion, Partridge, meet 'a lame fellow in rags' seeking alms. When Tom gives him a shilling, the man produces a pocket-book he had found which, it transpires, belongs to Tom's beloved Sophia and is discovered to contain a valuable bank bill. Tom, overjoyed, offers the beggar a further guinea but the man is greedy, pestering Tom for more; his 'discontented look' introduces a note of comedy.<sup>44</sup> Tom's benevolence here is the action of a gentleman, fulfilling his paternalistic obligations; by contrast, Partridge castigates the beggar angrily, telling him charity is the responsibility of the man's parish. As the recipient

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<sup>41</sup> Ardila 2015: 14-15.

<sup>42</sup> St Clair 2004: 534, 503.

<sup>43</sup> Ionescu 2011: 38.

<sup>44</sup> Fielding 1775: II, 241, 244.

of the protagonist's charity, the beggar performs the same moral function as the female mendicant in Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* plate, which had appeared at about the same time as Fielding's novel. In neither the book nor the print is there any tension between the sentiment of an act of benevolence and the comic representation of its recipient. The beggar in both instances remains an unproblematic and humorous figure.

As the century progressed, however, the iconography of the beggar came to be dominated by the sentimental mode; in scenes of benevolence, the figure was now an object of sympathy rather than the butt of humour. Illustrators of the beggar episode therefore faced the problem of reproducing the humour of Fielding's text in what was now construed as a sentimental scene. As a young artist, Gillray illustrated Tom's encounter as a stand-alone subject for the publisher, Thomas Macklin (1780: figure 4.8). Although he succeeds in conveying the comedy of the beggar's 'discontented look', he thereby frustrates the viewer's expectations of a deferential response in a seemingly sentimental encounter. The resulting incongruity is itself comic but shifts the emphasis away from Tom's benevolent action. When Luke Clennell represented this scene some thirty years later, he suppressed the comedy entirely to focus on the moral dimension to Fielding's text, contrasting Partridge's aggressive response to the beggar with Tom's benevolent gesture (1811: figure 4.9). Clennell draws on the sentimental iconography of the beggar to represent him as lame and deferential. The illustration appeared in the *British Novelists* series which published novels in weekly parts, retailing at one shilling.<sup>45</sup> The series would have reached a wider audience than Gillray's work, raising the possibility that Clennell's print was commissioned with these readers in mind. The artist's emphasis on social hierarchy would have been an important lesson for this wider audience in the troubled years that followed the French Revolution; moreover, the increased hostility to the vagrant made it imperative that the beggar be represented as a non-threatening figure. In this historical context, a comic representation of the beggar would have been unacceptable.

Unlike Fielding's episode, Smollett's account of his hero's encounter with a beggar was less amenable to sentimental and moralising treatment. Rebuffed by his beloved, Peregrine vows to seek consolation 'in the possession of the first willing wench he should meet upon the road'. Thus, when he comes upon a beggarwoman and her daughter, soliciting alms, he offers the mother a sum of money in exchange for the girl, a sum she gladly accepts; nor does the wench go unwillingly. Smollett clearly intends comedy here, as evidenced by his

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<sup>45</sup> St Clair 2004: 536.

elevating the 'wench' to 'a nymph of the road'.<sup>46</sup> Her later expletives make clear this is no sentimental encounter; rather it is one in which social relations have been reduced to a commercial transaction. Later, however, Peregrine has a change of heart. Seeing the girl transformed by vigorous ablutions and clean clothes, he decides to try and pass her off as a lady, though his experiment predictably fails. Nevertheless, nowhere does Smollett invite sympathy for the beggar girl as the victim of Peregrine's whim: she remains a comic figure throughout, eventually marrying Peregrine's valet.

The illustrations of this episode, produced by four different artists over a period of forty years, offer a further insight into how the problem of representing the comic, and here undeserving, beggar was addressed. In the earliest illustrated edition of the novel, Henry Fuseli used Peregrine's purchase of the beggar girl as the subject of a frontispiece (1769: figure 4.10). He focuses on the beggarwoman, representing her, in a departure from Smollett's text, as a bent crone, supported by a crutch. Fuseli here references the much earlier iconographic tradition of the rogue beggar in which physical deformity and ugliness signified a corrupt nature. This beggarwoman is a sly figure, holding out the coin she has received with a knowing look which invites the reader's collusion. No later illustrator would draw on Fuseli's iconography, however, indicating that it was already outdated when he used it. Ugliness and deformity had ceased to imply depravity: Donald notes that 'a cheerful, rational view of ugliness' in fact prevailed for much of the century.<sup>47</sup> Fuseli's representation of a sinister but comic beggar thus remained exceptional.

The increasing dominance of the sentimental mode created problems for Smollett's later illustrators. Richard Corbould's solution when he illustrated the episode for Cooke's cheap edition of the novel in 1797, was to effect a compromise with Smollett's text (figure 4.11).<sup>48</sup> He produced a seemingly sentimental scene of benevolence in which Peregrine, the mounted horseman, offers money to the two beggarwomen, neither of whom is noticeably ragged. An architectural surround serves to both elevate and prettify the scene while the figure of Cupid hints delicately at the erotic nature of the encounter. However, the sexualised figure of the beggar girl strikes a discordant note: pert, her breasts barely covered, she does not invite sympathy. Her bold, provocative stance is Corbould's concession to the comedy of the original text. A similar compromise is evident in Rowlandson's less elaborate illustration of the episode; here, although the older woman

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<sup>46</sup> Smollett 1769: IV, 21, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Donald 1996: 10.

<sup>48</sup> By the end of the century, Cooke's novels were circulating widely at sixpence a part. (St Clair 2004: 349)

accepts Peregrine's money with the deference of the deserving beggar, her daughter appears a slatternly figure with breasts even more fully exposed (1796: figure 4.12). Nevertheless, as in Corbould's image, the robust humour of Smollett's text is considerably muted.

It would be tempting to deduce from the illustrations to both *Peregrine Pickle* and *Tom Jones* a straightforward development in the representation of the comic beggar in which the comic gave way to more sentimental interpretations. However, the evidence does not support such a smooth transition.<sup>49</sup> Fuseli's unsentimental frontispiece continued to appear in editions of the novel as late as 1793 while a later illustration by Thomas Sargent again represented the beggarwoman as a sinister crone (1810: figure 4.13). Produced, like Clennell's work, for the *British Novelists* series, Sargent's image offers neither sentiment nor comedy. His beggarwoman is here a mercenary bawd who threatens rather than defers and is happy to trade her bare-breasted daughter with the powerful figure of an older Peregrine. It could be argued that, like Clennell, Sargent has also produced a didactic image: the blatant self-display of this beggar girl represents the allure of vice. Such a reading is all the more plausible given that Smollett's coarse humour was attracting mounting criticism by this date. In 1796, his biographer had singled out the language of the beggar girl as 'culpably obscene'; some ten years later, the Revd Edward Mangin railed against the author's scant regard for decency.<sup>50</sup> Tastes in comedy had clearly changed; although the visual evidence does not support the wholesale imposition of a sentimental reading of Peregrine's encounter, it does show a progressive suppression of Smollett's indelicate comedy.

If Smollett declined in popularity, however, Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) continued a best-seller. Like *Peregrine Pickle*, Sterne's novel charts the travels of its hero, Yorick; however, as many scholars have argued, *A Sentimental Journey* represents 'a sentimentalization of the picaresque', offering a more delicate comedy better suited to a polite female readership than the robust humour of Fielding and Smollett.<sup>51</sup> Where *Peregrine Pickle* had featured comedy precipitated by an unreflecting man of action, Sterne offers the gentle humour of a wryly self-observant narrator. When Yorick comes upon 'a poor little dwarfish brisk fellow' among the beggars of Montreuil, he responds not

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<sup>49</sup> Julian Fung has argued against any 'neat evolutionary progression' in the illustrations of Smollett's novels. (Fung 2014: 44.)

<sup>50</sup> Anderson 1796: 48; Mangin 1808: 50.

<sup>51</sup> Chandler 2013: 180.

with a cruel practical joke but by making him 'a charity'.<sup>52</sup> His response to the female poor also differs from that of Peregrine who, as already noted, treats the beggar girl as an object to be used for his own ends. By contrast, when Yorick encounters a French *fille de chambre*, the play between his desire and the minutely described civilities in which it is expressed produces a subtle comedy quite unlike Smollett's coarse humour. For Yorick, the erotic and the sentimental are inextricably linked, with nature's 'web of kindness' entangled with 'some threads of love and desire'.<sup>53</sup> Such delicacy in human relations accorded with the ideals of both sentimentalism and politeness.

If Sterne's text combines sentiment and comedy, illustrations of his beggar episodes succeed only in conveying the sentiment. In Paris, Yorick describes a comic encounter with a wily beggar who makes an outrageous demand for charity by asking two ladies for twelve sous. Despite their initial astonishment at his effrontery, the beggar succeeds by flattery in eventually winning twelve sous from each.<sup>54</sup> However, Francis Wheatley's painting of this episode presents a stereotypical image of feminine benevolence to a deferential beggar, ignoring the comedy of Yorick's narration (1789: figure 4.14). Illustrators similarly proved unable to represent the understated humour of Yorick's meeting with the beggars of Montreuil. In Sterne's text, one beggar makes 'a disqualifying bow', yielding his claim for alms to his fellow female beggars.<sup>55</sup> In Richard Austin's illustration, however, the disqualifying bow becomes simply the stereotypical pose of the deferential beggar, while an earlier illustration after Samuel Hieronymus Grimm shows the beggar as a disconsolate figure in the foreground of a scene of paternalistic benevolence (1807: figure 4.15).<sup>56</sup> The suppression of the comic in favour of a sentimental iconography in all three scenes supports W. B. Gerard's argument that illustrators of *A Sentimental Journey* tended to depict the 'ethical behavior that is recommended by the texts', thus giving 'a didactic role to sentimental expression'. Gerard reads the Montreuil episode as an example of 'social sentiment' which he defines as the spontaneous fellow feeling between strangers in a public space.<sup>57</sup> Certainly Wheatley's illustration focuses on this social sentiment rather than offering a faithful representation of Sterne's text; neither of the ladies appears as the 'tall lean figure of a woman' of the author's description.<sup>58</sup> Although the

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<sup>52</sup> Sterne 1768: I, 113-114.

<sup>53</sup> Sterne 1768: II, 100.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid: II, 149-153.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid: I, 112.

<sup>56</sup> For Grimm's illustration, see <https://www.zvab.com/Bettler-Beggars-asking-Alms-SterneMontreuil/18340654732/bd#&gid=1&pid=1>.

<sup>57</sup> Gerard 2006: 98, 107.

<sup>58</sup> Sterne 1768: I, 150.

emphasis on sentiment is in accord with the dominant iconography of the beggar at the time, it still remains that Sterne's comedy proved a challenge to represent in visual terms.

The problem of representing the comic beggar of literature in the second half of the eighteenth century was never satisfactorily resolved. The much earlier iconography of the rogue beggar, deployed in Fuseli's illustration for Smollett's text, had become outdated. The emphasis placed by sentimentalism on shared humanity, together with the tolerance demanded by the ideal of politeness, now made the ridicule of poverty and disability unpalatable. Moreover, by the end of the century, in the face of growing fears over the public disorder associated with the vagrant, it became important to represent the figure as a deferential and deserving member of a hierarchical society. In this socio-political context, the sentimental iconography of the beggar assumed dominance. However, if artists reimagined the picaresque hero's encounter with the beggar as a sentimental scene, any residual comic elements would strike a discordant note. If, by contrast, they ignored the comedy to focus on the moral dimension of the scene, they no longer remained faithful to the original text. Nor did artists succeed in finding the visual language to reproduce the nuanced humour with which the beggar was represented in Sterne's sentimental novel. The problem of illustrating literature's comic beggars thus remained unsolved.

### Section Three: The comic beggars of Thomas Rowlandson

Rowlandson introduced the figure of the beggar into his non-political graphic images more frequently than any other artist in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In total, the mendicant makes over twenty-five appearances in his work. Although his beggars feature mainly in urban scenes, often as a characteristic of London life, he only rarely represents them receiving alms. I argue in this section that Rowlandson's beggars, like those in the social satire of the 1780s, function predominantly to criticise the uncharitable. In making this case, I qualify the arguments of scholars such as Rauser, who has asserted that 'Thomas Rowlandson's comedy is amoral', and Gatrell, for whom Rowlandson's art lacks 'moral judgement'.<sup>59</sup> Instead, I will argue that Rowlandson, in his representations of the beggar, successfully integrates the comic and sentimental perspectives, thereby offering a visual counterpart to what Sterne had achieved in his writing.

Few sentimental scenes of benevolence feature in Rowlandson's work, however. The artist had trained at the Royal Academy Schools in the 1770s and continued to produce

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<sup>59</sup> Rauser 2011: 45; Gatrell 2011: 29.

pastoral scenes throughout his career. Sixteen of Rowlandson's drawing book sketches were published 'For The Use Of Learners': among the figure types were two vignettes showing scenes of female benevolence to the deserving poor (1790: figures 4.16, 4.17).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Rowlandson's inclusion of a blind beggar on another sheet of figure studies from a series entitled *Picturesque Studies*, suggests that, for him, the beggar had a place in the picturesque.<sup>61</sup> In his more elaborate compositions, however, such sentimental iconography is integrated into more humorous scenes. Even in his illustration of Somerset House for Rudolph Ackermann's topographical publication, *Microcosm of London*, in which a gentleman gives alms to a lame beggar, the figure of a portly, elderly gentleman introduces a comic note (1809: figure 4.18).<sup>62</sup> A more obvious example of the artist's integration of comic and sentimental perspectives can be found in an early untitled watercolour that depicts an act of benevolence with an element of erotic voyeurism (1784: figure 4.19). Outside a country inn, a seated officer, encouraged by his female companion, gives alms to an attractive young woman accompanied by children; since she is in no obvious distress, it is unclear if she had solicited his charity. To the right, another officer ogles the woman through his eyeglass. By mitigating the pathos of the needy mother and only gently satirising the officer's voyeuristic interest, Rowlandson succeeds in creating in visual terms the delicate balance of humour, pathos and eros that Sterne had achieved in his writing.

More typically Rowlandson's beggars appear in satirical scenes in which charity is denied. *A Cat in Pattens* depicts an urban scene in which the object of the satire is an old maid who is shown, closely followed by her black servant, sweeping past a ragged beggar (1812: figure 4.20). The church spire in the background signifies the virtue of Christian charity but the woman ignores the beggar's request for alms. Rowlandson satirises the old maid both in the title's oblique reference to a 'catamaran', a slang term for 'an old scraggy woman', and by giving her the features and whiskers of a cat.<sup>63</sup> Amanda Vickery's research has shown the old maid to be a frequent butt of eighteenth-century satire, both visual and literary, in which her inappropriate dress signifies her sexual appetite.<sup>64</sup> The narrator of *The New London Spy* (1771), for example, scornfully describes one such spinster as a

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<sup>60</sup> Grolier Club 1916: 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Picturesque Studies and Scenes of Everyday Life and People*, 1790. (Royal Collection Trust RCIN 810391) A further sentimental scene of benevolence appears in Rowlandson's frontispiece to the 1817 edition of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which depicts the Primrose family giving alms to a beggar's family, although this event is not in the novel. (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/789164>)

<sup>62</sup> Rowlandson and Pugin 1904: 86.

<sup>63</sup> Grose 1796.

<sup>64</sup> Vickery 2013: 867, 865.

'dame of about threescore', dressed 'in all the gaiety of twenty; like an old ewe dressed lamb-fashion'.<sup>65</sup> In his image, Rowlandson intensifies the satire of the old maid by her refusal of charity.

If this spinster offends against Christian morality, she also offends against the new social morality that informs Rowlandson's work. The artist consistently celebrates the natural in human behaviour while ridiculing its opposite; from this perspective the barren state of the elderly spinster is unnatural by comparison to the normative figure of the nurturing mother. Moreover, as Cindy McCreery has argued, while the latter serves society by producing the nation's future manpower, the old maid was, supposedly, a burden on society.<sup>66</sup> The contrast is given visual representation when Rowlandson's print is compared with Bigg's painting, *A Lady and Children Relieving a Cottager*, discussed earlier (figure 2.23). In both images a woman accompanied by her dog, and a black servant bearing an umbrella, encounters a beggar. Whereas for Bigg's young mother this presents an opportunity to practise benevolence and to teach the social virtue to her children, the childless old maid thinks only of herself. For Rowlandson, moral behaviour is what is good for society rather than what will lead to personal salvation.

The artist not only celebrates the natural but also valorises instinct. By the second half of the eighteenth century instincts and feelings were widely regarded as the basis of moral life. G. J. Barker-Benfield is among several scholars to note 'the aggrandizement of feeling and its investment with moral value' during this period.<sup>67</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala goes so far as to argue that personal instinct was gradually elevated to become 'the supreme moral arbiter', provided it did no harm to the public good.<sup>68</sup> For Rowlandson, the natural and instinctive physical attraction between the young is a positive rather than a sin; Rauser argues that for him, as for many of his contemporaries, 'nature's force is supreme' and 'all our social constructs' can do little to withstand it.<sup>69</sup> Although Rauser associates this belief with the Romantics, vitalist accounts of nature that argued for 'an overarching force of animation and generation' in nature had been in evidence from the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>70</sup> However, the lust of an old man for a young woman is always for Rowlandson an object of satire, as both unnatural and ridiculous. *An Old Ewe Drest Lamb Fashion* targets the unnatural behaviour of both an old maid and an old man by showing the latter in

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<sup>65</sup> King 1771: 47.

<sup>66</sup> McCreery 2003: 113.

<sup>67</sup> Barker-Benfield 1992: xix.

<sup>68</sup> Dabhoiwala 2012: 87.

<sup>69</sup> Rauser 2011: 51.

<sup>70</sup> Packham 2012: 3.



hot pursuit of the fashionably dressed spinster whom he takes to be, as the inscription makes clear, a young woman (1810: figure 4.21). Both figures ignore the supplication of a female sweeper whom the old man rudely pushes aside. By here linking unnatural behaviour to a lack of charity, Rowlandson implicitly affirms the value of the fellow feeling that underpins the social virtues.<sup>71</sup>

The artist's satire does not, however, extend to the beggar. A comic, even grotesque, figure in *A Cat in Pattens*, he is clearly in need as his eye-patch, crutch and ragged clothes indicate. As has already been argued, the presence of a begging figure in an image introduces a moral dimension, however peripheral this might be. The act of begging demands a response; where supplication is met with refusal, judgement inevitably follows since the beggar functions as too potent a signifier to be simply comic when charity is denied. This moral dimension, however, only comes into play where a beggar is represented begging. When Rowlandson includes a figure who, although potentially a beggar, is not identified as such, then the effect can indeed be purely comic. So, in *View of the Interior of Simon Ward*, the blind and peg leg figure on the left is simply a comic-grotesque member of the congregation whom the parson's sermon has sent to sleep (1806: figure 4.22). Denial of charity to a beggar, however, in all Rowlandson's prints, always functions as a moral judgement of the uncharitable.<sup>72</sup>

For this reason, I would argue that the artist's beggar images, although constituting only a small part of his considerable output, qualify claims that his work is amoral. Rauser makes this general comment about Rowlandson's comedy in an essay on his political prints in which she argues further for Rowlandson's 'ironic', if not 'bemused', detachment, contrasting his refusal to make a moral judgement with Hogarth's didactic satires.<sup>73</sup> Gatrell makes the same contrast: 'even Hogarth had usually *judged*'.<sup>74</sup> However, all satire involves judgement since it creates ridicule by highlighting a transgression of accepted norms. Insofar as Rowlandson's satires of uncharitable behaviour represent it as a departure from the norms of both Christian and social morality, they do, therefore, make a moral judgement. It could be argued, however, that the comic energy of such scenes can overshadow the moral content and distance the viewer from any emotional involvement. In

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<sup>71</sup> For another scene in which an old man, lusting after a young woman, ignores a beggar's pleas, see *An Irish member on his way to ye House of Commons*, 1801-1809. (Museum of London A16186)

<sup>72</sup> Bernard Falk had noted that some of Rowlandson's social satires champion 'poor starvelings' against their oppressors. (Falk 1949: 112)

<sup>73</sup> Rauser 2011: 45, 48.

<sup>74</sup> Gatrell 2011: 29. Mark Bills similarly contends that Rowlandson's drawings do not 'offer any moral standpoint'. (Bills 2006: 106)

*Skaters on the Serpentine*, for example, the skaters who tumble on the frozen Serpentine rouse no sympathy (figure 4.4). Nevertheless, although comedy may create distance and even detachment, the moral critique remains; on the Serpentine, a beggar boy is spurned.<sup>75</sup>

The lack of emotional intensity in Rowlandson's work may explain why Rauser considers the artist's perspective to be one of detachment. Certainly, the genial comedy of his critique of the unnatural contrasts with the work of his fellow satirist, Gillray. Both artists contributed to the controversy in the final two decades of the century over the moral ambivalence of sensibility. According to its proponents, sensibility prompted man's finer feelings of sympathy; by contrast, its critics claimed that it produced an excessive and self-indulgent emotion. In *A Cat in Pattens*, Rowlandson satirises the old maid's unnatural sympathy for her clipped and pampered poodle; such extreme and misplaced fondness for animals formed a frequent target for contemporary satirists.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, Gillray, in his complex print, *New Morality*, offers a more biting and intellectual satire on such unnatural behaviour (1798: figure 4.23). He represents the figure of Sensibility as one of the muses of the supporters of the French Revolution; she has one foot on the decapitated head of Louis XVI, while weeping over the dead bird she holds in her hand. In his analysis of this image, Markman Ellis notes not only Gillray's critique of the misdirected emotion of an unnatural sympathy which 'cries more for a dead bird than a deposed king', but also the figure's political dimension, associating Sensibility with the overthrow of the established social order.<sup>77</sup> Rowlandson's satire lacks both the allusive content of Gillray's work and its emotional intensity.

The contrast between the two artists extends to their treatment of the begging figure. Although Gillray's beggars appear almost exclusively in his political satires, a sketch of a beggar by the artist has survived (1795-6: figure 4.24). No moral context is provided; the mendicant is an isolated figure, seemingly abandoned by society. Limp and exhausted, he conveys a desolation that remains outside Rowlandson's range.<sup>78</sup> Even when Rowlandson's beggars appear destitute, both the 'urgency of line', as identified by Mark Bills, and the context the artist provides, create comedy.<sup>79</sup> This is exemplified in one of his illustrations

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<sup>75</sup> Writing about Rowlandson's comic drawings of the rural poor, Barrell has identified an unfinished sketch from the 1790s in which an emaciated beggar is ignored by the countryfolk around him. He argues that moral judgement is not here called for but acknowledges that in these years, only in a very informal medium could such a subject escape moral judgement. (Barrell 1983: 438)

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, George Cruikshank's *Tabies [sic] and Tom Cat*, 1808. (BM 1935,0522.8.145) The sentimental figure of the animal lover has been discussed by Tobias Menely. (Menely 2007)

<sup>77</sup> Ellis 1996: 195-196.

<sup>78</sup> See also Gillray's drawing, *Pray Pity the Sorrows of a Poor Blind Man* (c. 1811), thought to be a self-portrait. (Hill 1965: 148. Illustration: 252)

<sup>79</sup> Bills 2006: 106.

for *The Military Adventures of Johnny Newcome* (1815: figure 4.25).<sup>80</sup> Here, the upstart soldier, Johnny Newcome, on his way to purchase supplies in Lisbon, swaggers past two beggars; although ragged and grotesque, their animated expressions are very different from the utter dejection of Gillray's subject. Nevertheless, in their different ways, the satires of both artists can make a pointed moral critique.

The range of Rowlandson's satire extends beyond individual behaviour to a more general critique of modern society, notably in his *Views of London*. Ackermann published six prints in this series between 1797 and 1798, four of which were by Rowlandson. All six depict the turnpikes that marked the entrances to London where tolls were collected and where the build-up of traffic created ideal sites at which to beg as the different social classes and their various vehicles converged. Rowlandson introduced the begging figure into three of his *Views*, depicting the turnpikes at Tottenham Court Road, Tyburn and Cambridge Heath respectively (figures 4.26, 4.27, 4.28). These scenes are informed by a dynamic energy, generated by the speeding traffic, as Rowlandson's satire turns London's turnpikes into comic theatre: an old man ogles two milkmaids, wigs fly and a litter of piglets runs amok. These *Views* exemplify the artist's method, as identified by Kate Grandjouan, of fusing satirical caricature with a topographical exactness learned from his academic training.<sup>81</sup>

The comedy, however, masks a more serious critique. The scenes can be read as parodies of the ordered views of London in the topographical prints by artists such as Malton, discussed in Chapter Three. Their parodic character becomes clear when Rowlandson's *View* of the Tottenham Court Road turnpike is compared with a topographical print of the same site, first published in Ackermann's *Repository of Arts* magazine (1812: figure 4.29). This later view emphasises the grandeur of London's architecture by giving prominence to the elegant facade of St James's Chapel. A rural tranquillity pervades the scene; animals are herded down an almost empty road, and the few figures are mere picturesque staffage. By contrast, Rowlandson creates an image of urban chaos: vehicles and riders of every description fill the scene and disorder threatens as two horses gallop out of control. The elegant architecture is distanced with the focus now on the thronging mass of comic actors who occupy the foreground. This satirical vision defies the ordered view of London's streets that the later print presents.

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<sup>80</sup> Roberts 1815.

<sup>81</sup> Grandjouan 2016.

A significant difference from Malton's topographical prints of the capital is Rowlandson's inclusion of the beggar. Ignored by the crowds, the figure functions to make a moral critique of London society. No one has time for the blind fiddler begging at Tottenham Court Road; at Tyburn, a driver's whip appears to threaten the approaching beggar family, while at Cambridge Heath, the crowd's attention is all for the upturned gig rather than the disabled beggar. In these scenes of modernity, traditional street-life has not completely vanished: milkmaids still peddle their wares and spectators watch a Punch and Judy show. However, the pace of modern life is pushing this traditional life aside and, with it, the customary values that had formerly informed relations between rich and poor. Rowlandson was not alone in highlighting such ruthless disregard for others. John Millar, a Scottish law professor, would observe in 1812 that in a commercial society, 'the pursuit of riches becomes a scramble, in which the hand of every man is against every other'.<sup>82</sup> The wealth created by rapid developments in commerce had funded magnificent buildings and urban improvements such as the gas lighting evident in the *Views*. However, it had also created a divided metropolis in which modernity was experienced in different ways by the rich and the poor. Hewling Luson, a naval clerk, had observed in a political pamphlet that London was a city where 'human nature appears in its most exalted state of grandeur, and in its lowest depth of misery'.<sup>83</sup> It is these same disturbing contrasts within the life of the city that Rowlandson represents in his satires.

Although the vast majority of Rowlandson's beggar images appear sympathetic, it has been suggested that one such figure in his work might be a rogue. *Pray Remember the Blind* is one of fifty-four London Cries that the artist produced between 1799 and 1820 (1811: figure 4.30). It depicts the Piazza at Covent Garden where a blind beggar receives charity from a pretty young lady; in the background, a foppish young man helps another lady from her coach. Tim Hitchcock has noted a discrepancy between the frequency with which visual images showed beggars in Covent Garden, and the criminal justice records, which show the actual places where they did beg to have been at sites such as the Royal Exchange and the Old London Bridge.<sup>84</sup> In Rowlandson's print, the Covent Garden setting allows for a contrast between the beggar's poverty and the fashionable figures around him. However, Sean Shesgreen has suggested that this beggar 'may be a fraud'.<sup>85</sup> Certainly the sturdy figure is not an object of pathos, nor does he show the deference expected of a

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<sup>82</sup> Millar 2004: IV, 778.

<sup>83</sup> Luson 1787: 32.

<sup>84</sup> Hitchcock 2011: 81-83.

<sup>85</sup> Shesgreen 2002: 6.

recipient of alms. Nevertheless, I read the scene as one of charitable almsgiving in which one lady scrutinises the figure to assess his worthiness; any satire is directed at the dandy to the rear. Although, as Lucinda Reinold has demonstrated, there was a longstanding tradition in European art of representing the blind male beggar as comic, this was not how the figure had been represented in earlier series of London Cries; he had escaped even Paul Sandby's harsh satire.<sup>86</sup> It is thus highly implausible that Rowlandson would satirise a blind mendicant in this otherwise characteristic work.

This study of the artist's representation of the beggar in his social satires has revealed a moral dimension to Rowlandson's work overlooked by recent scholarship. Rowlandson only rarely depicted an act of charity but when he did, it was always represented in a positive light as the normative giving of alms to the deserving poor. By contrast, the refusal of alms to the beggar in his satires served as a critique both of the unfeeling individual and, in his London crowd scenes, of a modern commercial society in pursuit of material gain. Despite the comic contexts in which his beggars appeared, and despite the figures' often grotesque appearance, Rowlandson never satirised the beggar, reserving his judgement for what he perceived as the unnatural behaviour of the elite and middle classes. Although his satires could never be termed didactic, to label his comedy as 'amoral' is to overlook the significant moral critique his beggar images create.

#### Section Four: The beggar and political satire

From the 1780s, artists introduced the figure of the beggar into political satire to attack prominent public figures. The mendicant did not appear as an object of social concern, however; instead, politicians were caricatured as fraudulent beggars in order to prompt laughter at their expense. This section will address the development from the mid-century political satire, in which the beggar still functioned as an emblematic figure signifying suffering, to their later appearances in such caricatures. I will demonstrate how these images not only attacked individual politicians in specific situations but also raised more general questions about the legitimacy of their power. I will argue further that these satires provide a rare visual context in which contemporary hostility to the mendicant found expression.

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<sup>86</sup> Reinold 1981: 103. In addition to Paul Sandby's *Walking Stationer* (1760: BM 1904,0819.565), see J. S. Muller's *The Blind Musician* (c. 1740: BM 1851,0308.463).

The beggar featured infrequently in mid-century political satire. However, mendicants are depicted in the anonymous print, *Past Present To Come*, which was produced at the end of the Seven Years War as a satire on Lord Bute's acceptance of the peace terms (c. 1762: figure 4.31). The prime minister is shown in a kilt beside the seated figure of a young George III, amidst scenes that represent the past, present and future of the title. The significance of this complex image for my purpose lies in the group of beggars in the right foreground representing the future, 'To Come', whose suffering is the result of their patriotic service. The group consists of a soldier with a missing arm who stands beside his pregnant wife and baby, and a seated soldier with a wooden leg, labelled 'Honour'. The speech bubble issuing from the latter's mouth, "Date Obelum [*sic*] ad Nos", recalls the Latin tag ('date obolum': give alms) associated with representations of Belisarius, the Byzantine general blinded and forced to beg. Linking these beggars to the heroic warrior gives them a moral stature as deserving objects of pity.

The print illustrates what Rauser terms the 'bimedial' form, typical of early political satire, in which word and image were combined as part of the emblematic tradition.<sup>87</sup> In sixteenth-century emblem books, images embodying ethical concepts were accompanied by a motto and verse epigram that served to clarify the meaning. The emblematic tradition continued into the eighteenth century in, for example, children's literature and satirical prints; Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* plate had featured emblematic visual devices in the surround (figure 1.3). In *Past Present To Come*, Henry Fox, Paymaster General during the war, is represented by the emblem of a fox's head while Bute is represented by the boot that appears in the inn sign to the right. Although such visual puns can create humour, this is not a comic image. The beggars here perform an emblematic function by representing the suffering that Bute's action will bring to the nation.

By contrast, later political satirists used the figure of the beggar in caricatures in order to make a subjective moral criticism of an individual. Historically, caricature has been understood as, in the words of Todd Porterfield, the use of 'exaggerated physiognomies that reveal true underlying character' for the purposes of social and political critique.<sup>88</sup> Different commentators have brought different emphases to their understanding of caricature; in the eighteenth century it was believed such physical distortion could rise above mere personal spite to acquire a moral function. James Peller Malcolm, for example, would later justify caricature as 'one of the means for the correction of vice and improper

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<sup>87</sup> Rauser 2008: 22.

<sup>88</sup> Porterfield 2011: 2.

conduct'.<sup>89</sup> More recently, Mike Goode has argued, in a volume edited by Porterfield, that eighteenth-century caricature influenced public opinion not 'by mirroring any kind of process of argument' but by ridicule. By provoking laughter through 'distortion and name-calling', Goode's argument that graphic satire appealed to a 'taste for the carnivalesque' will be significant for the beggar caricatures.<sup>90</sup>

Scholars such as Donald reject a teleological approach to the dominance of caricature in the 1780s. She argues against a linear development from the emblematic to caricature, seeing both modes continuing in a dialectical relationship. She contends that the emblematic tradition constituted a graphic language associated with the common people, and that the political satire that emerged in the 1780s was a more elite idiom. Dispensing with textual captions and relying more on personal caricature and visual wit, such satires would, Donald believes, have been inaccessible to the lower classes, just as the hieroglyphic code of the common people was alien to the more educated classes.<sup>91</sup> Eirwen Nicholson similarly rejects a model of linear development but disputes Donald's alignment of the two visual modes of emblem and caricature with different social classes, arguing instead that an emblematic combination of text and image continued to feature in most political prints.<sup>92</sup> Since Nicholson has argued elsewhere that the political print appealed to the knowledgeable audience of those inside Westminster rather than to a mass audience, it would follow that the emblematic was familiar to elite and popular viewers alike.<sup>93</sup> More recently, Rauser has reaffirmed the concept of evolutionary development, arguing for a watershed moment around 1780 when the appearance of caricature in political prints marked the rise of a new individualism, with caricatures featuring 'selves' where emblems had featured things.<sup>94</sup> The later political satires which feature the beggar can provide evidence to contribute to this debate.

Certainly, the 1780s saw a significant shift, which is exemplified by comparing satires of Henry Fox with those of his son, the Whig leader Charles James Fox. Whereas prints of Henry, such as *Past Present To Come*, had represented him with an emblematic fox's head, satires of Charles James offered a more personal caricature. He could still be found in fox's guise, but by the 1780s, was also appearing as Harlequin, the Knave of Hearts or, more

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<sup>89</sup> Malcolm 1813: iii.

<sup>90</sup> Goode 2011: 129, 127.

<sup>91</sup> Donald 1996: 9, 56, 60, 149.

<sup>92</sup> Nicholson 1996a: 142, 150, 145.

<sup>93</sup> Nicholson 1996b: 14.

<sup>94</sup> Rauser 2008: 19, 20.

frequently, a beggar.<sup>95</sup> In 1784, no fewer than four satirical prints appeared, satirising Fox as a beggar in response to the political crisis of that year. Fox had formed a coalition government with Lord North in 1783 but met defeat over his India Bill to address the suspected corruption of the East India Company. Following this defeat, George III dismissed the coalition and dissolved Parliament in March 1784. The subsequent election saw the Tory William Pitt become Prime Minister. Of the four satires caricaturing Fox as a beggar that were produced in response to this crisis, two appeared in March: *A Journey to Malmesbury* shows Fox in a vagrants' pass-cart being sent back to his former parliamentary seat at Malmesbury, in anticipation of his defeat as MP for Westminster (figure 4.32).<sup>96</sup> Later that month came *Charles the Third, King of the Beggars*, with Fox now a blind beggar, led by a dog with the face of Lord North; Fox's blindness here is his lack of political judgement over the India Bill (figure 4.33). In April, *The Political Beggar* represented Fox as a ragged and disreputable beggar being seen off from the seat of power by barking dogs (figure 4.34). Fox did regain his Westminster seat in the election, but Pitt ordered a scrutiny of the votes and in June Fox now appeared in *The Mumping Fox* as a gentleman beggar, seeking funds for the scrutiny (figure 4.35). In all four satires the emblematic fox's head has been replaced by a more inventive and personalised caricature.

Fox appeared in the guise of a beggar more often than any other politician. At a literal level, Fox, as a parliamentary candidate, had indeed to beg either for electors' votes or for funds for a scrutiny. However, the comparison also had relevance at a personal level since Fox presented an increasingly dishevelled appearance and was frequently in debt, if not bankrupt. Vickery reads his unkempt appearance as 'a deliberate pose', while McCreery notes his self-presentation as 'the Man of the People', supporting parliamentary reform.<sup>97</sup> However apt the comparison, the representation of Fox as a beggar remains an example of the incongruity that Beattie had identified as the chief source of comedy. Moreover, caricaturing a leading statesman as a beggar represents an example of the 'world upside down' trope characteristic of carnival in which social hierarchy is overturned. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have identified symbolic inversion, or transgression, as the deliberate upending of commonly held cultural codes; such inversion of the categories of high and low status formed an essential tool for the caricaturist.<sup>98</sup> Satires of Fox as a

<sup>95</sup> *Charles James Cub Esq.*, 1771; *Reynard turn'd [sic] harlequin*, 1784, and *The Knave of Hearts*, 1782. (BM 1868,0808.9993, 1868,0808.5333, J,1.161)

<sup>96</sup> The vagrants' pass-cart was used to return vagrants to their native parish.

<sup>97</sup> Vickery 2013: 869; McCreery 1993: 174.

<sup>98</sup> Stallybrass and White 1986: 17-18.



beggar highlight his dependence on popular support and raise questions about his automatic right to power as one of the political elite.

These caricatures of Fox have further significance insofar as they all depict the beggar in a negative light. They thus give the rogue beggar a visual representation rarely found elsewhere during this period. In the Malmesbury print, Fox rides in a vagrants' pass-cart; in *Charles the Third*, the title's reference to the King of the Beggars links him to such rogues as Bampfylde-Moore Carew. *The Political Beggar* references the traditional iconography of the beggar thief seen off by guard dogs, while *The Mumping Fox* makes clear that Fox is a fraudulent beggar: 'His Wits you'll find your Pockets is to fleece'.<sup>99</sup> Significantly these prints appeared in the 1780s when, as noted earlier, hostility to vagrancy increased following demobilisation at the end of the American War. Such hostility towards the beggar as a perceived source of social disorder is given rare visual expression in these satires of Fox. The beggar here functions as a disguise for the politician; the viewer's negative response to the idle rogue is transferred to the wearer of the disguise, in this case, Fox.

These caricatures make a political point insofar as Fox, like the beggar, was perceived as a threat to the social order. As a Whig politician, Fox's fierce opposition to George III and his radical desire for parliamentary reform to prevent the monarch acquiring despotic powers, had alarmed many as a threat to the status quo.<sup>100</sup> Significantly, although a further satire of Fox as a beggar appeared in 1793, by that time satirists more frequently caricatured him as a sans-culotte, one of the Parisian lower classes whose republican aims were seen to pose a similar threat to the social order in the French Revolution.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Fox's begging for votes and money were often seen as self-seeking, again like the fraudulent beggar. In the India Bill crisis, for example, many believed him to be using the situation solely to gain wealth and power.<sup>102</sup> The visual metaphor of Fox as a rogue beggar therefore attacked his politics, at the same time giving expression to the fear and suspicion surrounding the beggar.

As is evident in these caricatures, political satires that featured the beggar drew on a wide range of cultural sources. These included not only rogue literature but also comic

<sup>99</sup> For the beggar thief iconography, see *Bell's Poets* frontispiece, 1777. (BM 1978,U.735)

<sup>100</sup> In several satires, Fox is shown as Guy Fawkes, about to blow up the constitution: see Gillray's *Guy Vaux*, 1782. (BM J,3.9)

<sup>101</sup> For Fox as a beggar, see *A Great Man in Distress*, 1793; as a sans-culotte, see *Blue and Buff Charity*, 1793, and *A right honble alias a san culotte alias a man of the people*, 1793. (BM 1868,0808.6298, 1868,0808.10374, 1851,0901.655)

<sup>102</sup> McCreery 1993: 166.

operas featuring characters from the underworld. A print by Charles Williams, *A Scene from the Beggars Opera*, for example, represents key public figures as characters from the criminal underworld in John Gay's popular hit (1805: figure 4.36). Although Fox makes an appearance, Williams' chief target was the Tory politician Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, shown here in leg irons as Macheath, the condemned highwayman. In the year this print appeared, Dundas had been impeached on the grounds of negligence while Treasurer of the Navy. When it was first performed in 1728, the main target of Gay's satirical opera had been the corruption and duplicity of the first minister, Robert Walpole: Williams' print, for all its comic incongruity, makes a similar political point. At the end of Gay's opera, the beggar narrator had pointed to the 'Similitude of Manner in high and low Life', such 'that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable Vices) the fine Gentlemen imitate the Gentlemen of the Road, or the Gentlemen of the Road the fine Gentlemen'.<sup>103</sup> In his print, Williams satirises public figures as little better than the members of the underworld in their self-interest and the vices into which it leads them.<sup>104</sup>

Political satire referenced not only the rogue beggar but also the beggar of sentimental literature. However, the familiar sentimental iconography of the latter figure was here used ironically, with the beggar being ridiculed as a fraud. The title of Gillray's satire, *Pity the Sorrows of a Poor Old Man*, for example, is taken from Thomas Moss's well-known poem, *The Beggar*; the print depicts Edmund Burke as a beggar seeking alms from the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford at the gates of his London residence (1796: figure 4.37). Burke, by now an old man, had been granted a state pension by the King but this had been objected to by, among others, the duke, a Whig who had welcomed the French Revolution as the prelude to reform in Britain.<sup>105</sup> In 1796, Burke penned 'A Letter to a Noble Lord' in which he both justified his pension in terms of his service to the country and attempted to argue that his own opposition to the French Revolution and support for the laws of property had in fact been in the interests of Bedford in the latter's capacity as a wealthy property owner.<sup>106</sup> Gillray here satirises the perceived apostasy of Burke, who had started his career as a Whig MP but later switched allegiance. He is given all the attributes of the sentimental beggar: his clothes are ragged and his stooped figure deferential. However, Gillray undercuts the sentiment of Burke's plea by emphasising his apostasy as he begs for the chance to recant

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<sup>103</sup> Gay 1728: 66.

<sup>104</sup> William Dent's print, *The Jovial Crew* (1786), satirised royalty and politicians as the rogue beggars of Brome's comic opera. (BM 1868,0808.5563)

<sup>105</sup> Lock 2006: II, 522.

<sup>106</sup> Burke 1796.

'once more'. Further irony comes from reducing Burke to the level of the common people whom he had belittled in his writings as 'these miserable sheep'.<sup>107</sup> By transforming the beggar from an object of pathos into the butt of ridicule, Gillray has reworked traditional iconography for new ends.<sup>108</sup>

As well as using the beggar to caricature public figures, satirists continued to reference the traditional emblematic function of the figure. The satire, *Politicians*, by the printmaker William Maynard exemplifies such continuity and supports Nicholson's argument for the persistence of the emblematic tradition in political satire (1795: figure 4.38).<sup>109</sup> The print represents a lame man being carried on the back of his blind companion, his eyes directing the other's feet; the blind man's broken shoes and the lame man's crutch and peg leg suggest that both are beggars. The print makes ironic reference to the traditional emblem, 'Mutuum Auxilium' (mutual aid); whereas the original emblem represented mutual help, each man supplying the other's deficiency, in Maynard's image the lame man directs his fellow towards a dangerous river. The satire thus subverts the original meaning of the emblem to suggest politicians strive not to support each other but to do each other harm.

Gillray also makes reference to the emblematic tradition in a satire prompted by the introduction of a controversial tax on dogs in 1796. In *John Bull & his Dog Faithful*, the specific reference is to a contemporary political joke: 'Pitt from the dog tax is exempt, I find, / The bill excepts such curs as lead the *blind*' (1796: figure 4.39).<sup>110</sup> Gillray represents John Bull, the embodiment of the nation, as a grotesque blind beggar walking along the edge of a precipice and pursued by Whig politicians in canine form. John Bull is dependent on his political leaders, here represented by Pitt as his guide dog, Faithful, to protect him from danger. By referencing the traditional emblem for Error that shows a blind man groping his way, however, Gillray makes clear that John Bull's trust is misguided.<sup>111</sup> His leaders have in fact weighed him down with taxes, represented by the burden of 'Loans' he carries, and sent him to war, from which he has returned severely maimed. The bone in Pitt's mouth, suspiciously like John Bull's missing leg, supports the implication that far from being 'Faithful', politicians have used their power not to protect but to exploit the

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<sup>107</sup> Burke 1791: 11.

<sup>108</sup> Rowlandson's only inclusion of a beggar in a political satire similarly uses irony to undercut the sentimental iconography: see *The Westminster Mendicant*, 1784. (BM 1851,0901.222)

<sup>109</sup> Identified only as 'Maynard', he is most probably William Maynard who was producing caricatures at the right date. (<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG167593>)

<sup>110</sup> Festa 2009: 16.

<sup>111</sup> See the English edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. (Ripa 1709: 27)

poor.<sup>112</sup> Gillray here represents the blind beggar not as an object of sentiment but rather as Pitt's dupe.

Analysis of these political satires has demonstrated that the emblematic tradition did persist alongside personal caricature in the graphic satire of the late eighteenth century. The beggar was used in these prints to represent prominent public figures, thus creating comic incongruity and a carnivalesque inversion which functioned to both ridicule the figures and question their right to power. Significantly, in all these political satires, the beggar appeared in a negative light. The prints thus acquire an added importance for this study as the only context in which the comic idle rogue was consistently given visual representation. This was only possible since this male beggar was not himself the subject of the satire but functioned as a recognisable type of an immoral character. In this way, the prints indirectly reveal an underlying hostility to the beggar that had been reinforced by the events surrounding the French Revolution. The humanitarian values of both sentimentalism and politeness might suppress this hostility but could not finally eradicate it.

### Conclusion

In the second half of the eighteenth century, social, cultural and political developments made the visual representation of the beggar as a comic figure problematic. The belief in a common humanity that informed sentimentalism restricted the subjects now considered appropriate for comedy. Likewise, contemporary notions of polite conduct, which the middle classes adopted as the mark of gentility, made it unacceptable to treat one's social inferiors with scorn and contempt. Neither the poverty nor the disability characteristic of the beggar was now considered an acceptable object for ridicule, nor could vice ever be a source of laughter. One consequence of these developments was that the earlier moralistic social satire of Hogarth gave way to a comedy of manners, satirising folly rather than vice.

The comic beggar proved difficult to accommodate in this new satire since she/he could now be neither ridiculed nor condemned. Rowlandson addressed the problem by changing the beggar's role; rather than the delinquent object of earlier satire, the figure now functioned as an instrument of moral critique, targeting the uncharitable. As well as

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<sup>112</sup> Gillray's quotation comes from John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1795: V, 896-897). 'Among the faithless, faithful only he' in the original describes the faithful Seraph Abdiel confronting Satan and his hosts; Gillray's use is therefore deeply ironic.

criticising individual behaviour, Rowlandson highlighted the social tensions evident in the capital as the rise of a commercial society threatened the traditional relations between rich and poor. Although the artist still represented the beggar in comic form and never made her or him the focus of social satires, the implicit critique made by the figure qualifies the view that Rowlandson's work is both amoral and non-judgemental.

Attempts to illustrate the comic beggar of literature, however, proved less successful. Although the mid-century picaresque novels of Fielding and Smollett continued to be read, their coarse and often cruel humour did not find visual representation. By the time artists came to illustrate the comic beggars of these works the sentimental iconography of the figure prevailed. As a result, they downplayed the comedy and either emphasised the sentimental aspects of the scenes or introduced sentiment into situations where there was none; in neither case were the illustrations faithful to the original text. By the early nineteenth century, fears over the public disorder associated with the vagrant made it important to represent these comic beggars now as subservient members of a hierarchical society or, more unusually, as in Sargent's illustration of Smollett, as unequivocal knaves. Illustrators of Sterne also had difficulty translating into visual terms the author's combination of sentiment and comedy in his treatment of the beggar; here again, artists suppressed the comic in favour of the sentimental. The dominance of sentimental iconography in these illustrations suggests that this was society's preferred perception of the beggar.

Elite hostility to the vagrant figure only found consistent visual expression in the political satire of the 1780s and beyond. By using the rogue beggar as one term of a visual metaphor, satirists transferred the negative characteristics of the figure to the object of their satire. They created no new iconography of the comic rogue but instead drew on the earlier emblematic tradition or else subverted a sentimental iconography to make their political comment. Although few, the caricatures that used the rogue beggar served to harness contemporary anxieties surrounding the figure at a time when humanitarian ideals made hostility to the beggar difficult to express.

This chapter has highlighted the problems faced by artists who would represent the beggar as a comic figure in a sentimental age. I have argued that Rowlandson was the graphic artist who successfully combined the sentimental and comic perspectives when depicting the figure in his social satires. Nevertheless, however problematic the visual representation of the comic beggar, their presence in an image was never incidental: whether highlighting the disregard of the rich for the poor in a modern commercial society,

or satirising contemporary politicians, the figure offers further proof of Stallybrass and White's claim that 'what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central'.<sup>113</sup> In all these images, the comic beggar acquires a significance beyond that of merely creating humour.

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<sup>113</sup> Stallybrass and White 1986: 5.

## Chapter Five

### Representing the beggar in the years following the French Revolution

#### Introduction

This chapter examines developments in the imagery of the mendicant poor during the latter part of the period explored in this study, from the 1790s to 1820s. This period witnessed, on the one hand, an increasing hardening of attitudes towards the poor, prompted in large part by growing fears of disorder in the aftermath of the French Revolution, which were in turn reinforced by the rise of evangelicalism with its sternly moralistic view of poverty. On the other hand, they saw a persistence of the established iconography of the beggar, representing her or him as a deserving figure to whom the viewer would be expected to respond with sympathy. It was not until the 1820s that a distinctively new visual type of the beggar appeared, by which time changing attitudes had led to the establishing of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity in 1818. The sudden appearance of this new beggar imagery is a phenomenon that stands in need of explanation.

The visual representation of the poor in the opening years of the nineteenth century has received little attention from art historians by comparison to the earlier period. As discussed in the Introduction, of the two scholars who have addressed this topic, John Barrell has written about paintings of the rural poor as well as the cottage prints produced in the aftermath of the French Revolution, while David Solkin's work examines early nineteenth-century paintings of everyday life.<sup>1</sup> However, neither scholar deals specifically with the figure of the beggar. In contrast to the paucity of research into visual representations of the beggar in these years, there has been considerable scholarship on the depiction of the figure in the literary works of William Wordsworth alone. One source of interest in the poet's texts has been their direct engagement with significant contemporary issues surrounding the poor and outcast: his *Old Cumberland Beggar*, for example, has been read as addressing 'a wide range of contemporary debates about vagrancy and the poor laws'.<sup>2</sup> The absence of comparable art history scholarship on images of the beggar in the same period is a gap that this chapter will go some way to fill.

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<sup>1</sup> Barrell 1980, 2005; Solkin 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Simpson 2009: 64.

The first section focuses on middle-class attitudes to poverty in these years with particular reference to evangelicalism. The key issue will be how far such attitudes informed representations of the beggar. In the second section, I examine the amoral response to the mendicant evident in illustrations to the collections of eccentric biographies that featured men and women who deviated from the norm. This new type of beggar imagery is shown to be part of a wider attempt to classify society in the early nineteenth century. Section Three considers the few prints from the period that represent the suffering of the mendicant poor. The crucial point here is that their aim was not to address the plight of the poor but rather to attack the rich. In the final section, I address two very different types of beggar imagery that emerged in the decade following the end of the Napoleonic wars. I argue that the picturesque beggars of John Thomas Smith and the new comic images of an amoral crew of jolly beggars can both be read as responses to the extreme hostility to the beggar in these years. The chapter as a whole will demonstrate that, far from the beggar imagery changing as a result of the increasing antagonism towards the mendicant, many of the images ignore or even deny these new attitudes.

### Section One: Changing attitudes to charity

New attitudes to the problem of poverty emerged in the late eighteenth century as the role of official relief came under scrutiny and increasing emphasis was placed on the importance of the moral reformation of the individual. Parliamentary enquiries were instigated into the social problems of vagrancy and mendicity; at the same time, the troubled 1790s saw urgent calls for the policing of social deviance.<sup>3</sup> The following section will address the changing attitudes to poverty in these years and consider how far corresponding shifts can be discerned in the beggar imagery, by examining both prints and paintings.

The 1790s saw an intensification of the moral reform project that had begun in the 1780s. Early calls to arrest the nation's moral decline were in part prompted by the loss of the American colonies in 1783 which had been regarded as a divine punishment for the nation's moral failings.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the century, Britain's economic troubles at home and wars abroad lent an urgency to the call for national reform; new voluntary societies were

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<sup>3</sup> Roberts 1998: 74.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts 2004: 30; Colley 1996: 373. The evangelical William Wilberforce would later refer to the widespread belief that 'the sufferings of nations are to be regarded as the punishment of national crimes'. (Wilberforce 1807: 4)



established to put this project into practice.<sup>5</sup> Counting many evangelicals among their supporters, they ranged from societies with specific targets, such as the Relief of Poor Widows and Orphans of the Clergy, to those with a wider remit, such as The Society for the Suppression of Vice.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in the work of these societies was a new understanding of charity; as well as offering financial assistance to the deserving poor, they also, as Donna Andrew argues, aimed 'to reform the minds and morals of the laboring poor'.<sup>7</sup> The exemplary voice of this new development was the prominent evangelical writer Hannah More, who uses a character in her novel, *Coelebs in search of a wife* (1809), to voice her own definition of charity. True charity seeks 'to make men better, by the infusion of a religious principle, which shall check idleness, drinking, and extravagance', so putting the poor in the way to become 'healthier, and richer, and happier'. In promoting this new model of philanthropy, More condemns the traditional model of paternalistic benevolence as unthinking and indiscriminate. Thus, she writes of another character in her novel, Sir John Belfield, that he 'too much limited his ideas of bounty to bodily wants': 'time, inquiry, discrimination, system, he confessed he had not much taken into the account'.<sup>8</sup> Active intervention in the lives of the poor was necessary in order to effect change.

Although supporters of the voluntary societies included the landed elite, they were predominantly drawn from the middle class; many supporters, although not all, were evangelicals.<sup>9</sup> Implicit in the evangelical programme of moral rehabilitation was the belief that poverty was the consequence of the moral failings of the poor; as noted in the Introduction, the historian Stephen King has argued that such reasoning by the middle class was an attempt to justify the increasing disparity of wealth between rich and poor.<sup>10</sup> However, if the reform movement criticised the idle and improvident poor, it also, as Andrew has argued, targeted the immorality of the rich that 'harmed the public weal'.<sup>11</sup> The leaders of the reform project had to tread a careful path between their desire to reform the rich and their need to enlist the support of the ruling classes if their programme of national reform was to succeed. Nevertheless, More was adamant that change was as necessary among the upper ranks of society as among the poor: 'Reformation must begin with the GREAT [...] *Their* example is the fountain from whence the vulgar draw their habits,

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<sup>5</sup> Although voluntary associations had existed since the late seventeenth century, the 1790s saw 'a new phase of expanded volunteer activity'. (Roberts 1998: 73)

<sup>6</sup> Ford K Brown gives a list of the many societies established after 1750. (Brown 1961: 333ff.)

<sup>7</sup> Andrew 1989: 201.

<sup>8</sup> More 1859: 229, 228-229.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts 2004: viii; Brown 1961: 358.

<sup>10</sup> King 2000: 105.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew 2013: 4.

actions, and characters'.<sup>12</sup> She was joined in her criticism by the national press which regularly highlighted the vices of the aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> By thus separating themselves from both the idle poor and the irresponsible rich, the middle classes asserted their own virtue, acquiring, as Andrew suggests, 'a sense of moral superiority and self-confidence'.<sup>14</sup> Middle-class involvement in the voluntary societies contributed to this growing self-confidence; indeed, the literary scholar Kevin Gilmartin goes so far as to see this 'centralized network of middle-class philanthropy', with its 'extraordinary powers of surveillance and control' over the lower orders, as offering a challenge to the landed gentry's role as the instrument of social order.<sup>15</sup> As supporters of the reform movement, the middle classes were establishing their identity by their sense of difference both from their social superiors and from those below them.

In their thinking about poverty, the evangelicals were at odds with the traditional Anglican view. The dominant moderate evangelicals, among whom were the social reformers of the Clapham Sect, such as William Wilberforce, opposed state intervention in the form of official relief to the poor; such relief, they believed, both encouraged dependence and failed to exercise adequate discrimination. Rather, they favoured *laissez-faire* policies, confident that these would reveal a providential and just natural order.<sup>16</sup> However, traditional Anglicans disagreed: the clergyman William Paley, for example, argued that the poor had a claim to government assistance since 'the care of the poor ought to be the principal object of all laws'.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Paley's belief in the social hierarchy, set out in his *Natural Theology* (1802), was shared by the evangelicals whose middle- and upper-class members were, as Boyd Hilton has argued, essentially conservative.<sup>18</sup> Paley claimed that in a world designed by God, there must always be 'great disparity of *wealth* and *station*' if 'the various demands of civil life' are to be met. Without the poor, 'the necessary labour of life could not be carried on'.<sup>19</sup> The subordination of the poor was a central tenet of both the conventionally Anglican Paley and the evangelical reform movement; upholding the social order had become of paramount importance in the face of the threat posed by the revolutionary movement abroad.

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<sup>12</sup> More 1788: 116.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew 2013: 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 246. See the main Introduction for Anne Borsay's research into the ways in which charitable work fostered middle-class identity.

<sup>15</sup> Gilmartin 2003: 507, 533.

<sup>16</sup> Hilton 1988: 94.

<sup>17</sup> Paley 1785: 199.

<sup>18</sup> Hilton 1988: 205.

<sup>19</sup> Paley 1802: 555, 556.

It might be expected that evidence of these significant cultural developments would be apparent in the beggar imagery of the time. However, there was no immediate obvious change in representations of the mendicant. Single-figure paintings of the beggar continued to feature in exhibitions: the catalogues of both the Royal Academy and the British Institution show the figure to have remained a popular subject. Between its first exhibition in 1806, and 1815, the British Institution alone displayed some nineteen paintings by British artists whose titles made reference to the beggar. Few of these paintings can now be traced but titles such as *An old beggar* and *A beggar woman and children* suggest that they continued to represent the deserving poor whose right to charity had never been questioned. Even Sir Frederick Eden, a writer on poverty who vehemently opposed the Poor Laws for encouraging idleness, recognised that 'the infirm are avowedly objects of charity'.<sup>20</sup> One painting of a child beggar that has survived, although never exhibited, is John Sell Cotman's *The Beggar Boy* (1808: figure 5.1). Cotman's boy appears a less challenging figure than the beggar boys of Reynolds and Opie (figures 2.3, 2.8); he does not meet the viewer with a direct gaze and is unusually well dressed. Cotman was predominantly a landscape painter, so may have been hoping to benefit from the continuing popularity of the fancy picture. His painting here provides evidence that the deserving beggar was still being represented as an object of sympathy in these years.

Paintings depicting scenes of almsgiving to the begging figure, however, declined in number. From the evidence of their titles, it would appear that nine narrative scenes of benevolence were exhibited at the Royal Academy in the 1790s, but only three in the first fifteen years of the new century; none was exhibited at the British Institution that had not already been shown at the Academy. Moreover, some of the titles from the early nineteenth century suggest a shift in emphasis from the object of charity to the act itself; at the Royal Academy, for example, Opie exhibited *The visit to the cottage: or clothing to the naked* (1803), while the Reverend M<sup>c</sup>Quin showed *Alms-giving one of the works of mercy* (1807).<sup>21</sup> By invoking the Seven Works of Mercy, these paintings take on a symbolic function, thereby avoiding the problematic nature of individual almsgiving in the here and now. A similar tendency can be seen in the increase in paintings exhibited with such abstract titles as *Charity* or *Benevolence*. Although none of these can now be traced, the figure of Charity also featured in popular prints produced in the late 1790s and early 1800s, which use the traditional iconography of a mother with children; some include a

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<sup>20</sup> Eden 1797: I, 412.

<sup>21</sup> Catalogue nos. 17, 64.

background scene of benevolence in which the elite give alms in an idyllic rural landscape (1797: figure 5.2). The allegorical figure here functions to raise the giving of alms above the level of the specific to the generic, obviating the need for either discrimination or justification.

Among the representations of paternalistic almsgiving to the beggar that have survived, however, is one clear example of the traditional iconography being employed to defend the social hierarchy in troubled times. In 1795, a year that saw poor harvests and food riots, a halfpenny token was issued at Badminton in Gloucestershire that featured on the obverse a beggar receiving alms, inscribed with the Biblical quotation, 'I was hungry and ye gave me meat' (figure 5.3). The reverse side carried the inscription, 'To the illustrious Duke of Beaufort the friend of mankind & his worthy tenants who reduced the price of their wheat to 9s pr. bushel'. This reference to an earlier tradition of the beggar as one of the sacred poor served to promote the religious duty of charity which is here equated with the paternalistic benevolence shown by the Duke in time of dearth. It demonstrates the landed elite fulfilling their responsibilities to the poor in a hierarchical society. Many tokens of varying design were issued privately in the late eighteenth century to deal with chronic shortages of small change; the Badminton token was produced by two collectors of tokens from Bath who used the beggar design and accompanying inscription for two further tokens issued the following year.<sup>22</sup> Both promised government action in the face of food shortages on their reverse sides: 'Corn imported by government 1796' and 'The sale of corn by weight proposed 1796'.<sup>23</sup> These tokens provide evidence that the traditional iconography of almsgiving to the beggar continued to have resonance as demonstrating both a hierarchical social order and a moral economy based on Christian principles.<sup>24</sup>

Although it is hard to discern any significant change in those beggar images that have survived from the period, there is one scene of almsgiving that can be aligned with the moral reform project. The illustrated ballad, *Humanity's Cot*, was among the numerous popular prints produced by Robert Sayer in the 1790s for what Barrell terms 'a vulgar urban audience' (1794: figure 5.4).<sup>25</sup> The print depicts a well-to-do couple, newlywed, emerging from a country church, the bride giving alms to an injured beggar and his family. The accompanying verses contrast the sporting gentry, whose time is spent hunting game

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<sup>22</sup> Bell 1966: 22.

<sup>23</sup> BM 1870,0507.18828; 1862,0917.17.

<sup>24</sup> For a similar promotion of the benevolence of the landed classes in these years, see the earlier discussion of the print after Gainsborough's *Charity Relieving Distress*.

<sup>25</sup> Barrell 2005: 61.

from their 'gay sporting boxes', with this virtuous couple who instead hunt 'vice to the toils' from their 'snug box call'd Humanity's cot', so winning 'the spoils of true honour'.<sup>26</sup> The scene promotes for its audience the social order envisaged by the reform movement. Not only do the gentry offer financial relief to the deserving poor; the gift of a book by the young bridesmaid to the beggar's daughter is most probably an offer of moral instruction as well. A grateful and submissive poor here acknowledge the benevolence of the gentry in an image of social harmony.

*Humanity's Cot* is most obviously exemplary of the moral reform movement in its attack on a pleasure-seeking aristocracy. In this context, the painting by George Morland, *The Benevolent Sportsman*, can be read as mounting a defence of the sporting gentry (figure 5.5). Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1792, the painting shows the title figure giving alms to a gipsy family in their camp in the countryside. The painting, which had been commissioned by Colonel Charles Stuart, the son of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute, a former prime minister, has been read by Barrell as celebrating paternalist social relations.<sup>27</sup> It is also, however, important to note that in so doing, it counters the middle-class criticism of a selfish landed elite. Morland here avoids the issue of almsgiving to the beggar by making gipsies the recipients of the sportsman's alms; as argued in Chapter Three, the vagrant gipsy appears in landscape art as a more picturesque and less problematic figure than the beggar. Morland's positive representation of a member of the sporting elite would no doubt have appealed to the aristocratic visitors to the Royal Academy.

Although scenes of individual almsgiving could still be found among the beggar images of these years, there is no surviving visual evidence from the early nineteenth century of the home visits to the urban poor now being practised by some of the voluntary societies.<sup>28</sup> However, evidence that representations of such philanthropic work did exist can be found in a review of a now lost painting by Samuel Drummond, *Benevolent ladies relieving a distressed family*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1817. The review describes the painting as depicting a 'matron and her daughter' who are 'giving money and the bible' to an impoverished family, one of whose members is sick.<sup>29</sup> The gift of a bible aligns the scene with evangelical values; moreover, the visit by these two ladies demonstrates how the moral reform project was empowering women, here seen as agents of reform. Not only do they offer both relief and religious instruction, but their visit also

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<sup>26</sup> Sporting boxes were the small houses used as a base for country sports.

<sup>27</sup> Barrell 1980: 123.

<sup>28</sup> Brown 1961: 238-40.

<sup>29</sup> *Literary Gazette*, 7 June 1817: 313.

makes possible the close inspection of the family's circumstances necessary to ensure that charity is discriminating. Here the 'time, inquiry, discrimination' and 'system' that More had demanded of philanthropic endeavour is seen in practice.

All the images of the beggar discussed so far have depicted the figure as unmistakably deserving. In her writings, however, More consistently represents the beggar as an idle figure in contrast to the industrious poor. The mendicant appears thus in her *Cheap Repository Tracts*, published between 1795 and 1798, which took the form of short moral tales and ballads promoting evangelical principles. By producing them in chapbook format More aimed to counteract what she regarded as the pernicious influence of the often ribald existing literature for the poor. Subsidies from supporters ensured the *Tracts* reached a wide audience among the poor, not only distributed gratis by the wealthy, but also sold by hawkers and chapmen.<sup>30</sup> In one tract, *A Beggarly Boy*, the title figure, who refuses the work offered to him by a wealthy man, is characterised as a picture of 'extreme filth'. Moreover, the text functions as a parable; as More makes clear, the child's 'seeming dullness and ingratitude, and insensibility' represents those who refuse Christ's invitation to enter his service. 'Filth and dirt' here equate with sin.<sup>31</sup> Rehabilitation never appears to be an option for the beggar; indeed, in *Black Giles the Poacher*, More argues that 'filth and laziness' only repel the charitable who recognise 'that it is next to impossible to mend the condition of those who degrade themselves by dirt and sloth'.<sup>32</sup> More's unequivocal message to her readers is that mendicity is the result of sin.<sup>33</sup>

However, no distinctive iconography for the idle beggar appears in the illustrations to More's texts. The crude woodcut that illustrates the title-page of a later edition of *The Beggarly Boy* gives no indication of the child's moral condition (1801?: figure 5.6). This is also true of the many edifying publications for children produced in the 1790s, in which the same traditional iconography is used both for the deserving and the idle beggar. In *The Looking-glass for the Mind* (1794), for example, the cautionary tale, 'The Destructive Consequences of Dissipation and Luxury', recounts how a former linen-draper is reduced to begging after squandering his fortune in debauchery and extravagance.<sup>34</sup> Yet the headpiece employs the familiar iconography of the deferential beggar receiving alms at a house door; that he had brought this state upon himself can only be understood from the

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<sup>30</sup> Gilmartin 2003: 513.

<sup>31</sup> More 1795?: 3, 17, 7.

<sup>32</sup> More 1796?: 4.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Nardin believes that More's private letters, by contrast, show a greater awareness of the economic causes that could lead to begging. (Nardin 2001: 272)

<sup>34</sup> Berquin 1794: 167.

text (figure 5.7). This discrepancy between text and image can in part be explained by reference to Barrell's argument that loyalist supporters of the government regarded 'the visual representation of abject poverty' as too disgusting 'to be capable of teaching a positive moral lesson'.<sup>35</sup> However, it is also significant that there was no British iconography of the idle beggar on which artists could draw. The idle beggar could be represented in didactic texts where a moralising commentary was possible; however, any graphic representation of the figure would challenge the image the elite wished to project of a subservient poor and could serve no edifying function.

One need look no further than this didactic juvenile literature of the 1790s for conclusive evidence of the shift in attitudes both to charity and to the beggar. Two editions of the *London Cries*, produced for children and separated by some forty years, offer commentaries on the figures of a beggarwoman and her children. The earlier, published in 1760 by Edward Ryland, urges its young readers to 'think how wretched is their case, / Who beg from door to door' and to respond with pity.<sup>36</sup> However, in the later *Cries*, produced in 1797, the female ballad singer, whose singing is a pretext for begging, is an object of moral censure. 'It is a great pity but what these children were taken care of, and the mother sent to hard labour, for she will most assuredly corrupt their morals, by her way of life'.<sup>37</sup> Both accounts are illustrated with generic images of a beggarwoman and her two children; neither figure suggests either virtue or vice.<sup>38</sup> However, the texts make clear that the early expression of sympathy for the mendicant was, by the end of the century, giving way to condemnation and a call for active intervention in the lives of the poor.

The evidence here reviewed has revealed a discrepancy between the wider discourse about the beggar and the visual representations of the figure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The need to uphold the social order in these troubled years saw images of paternalistic benevolence that reinforced the social hierarchy continue to predominate. No images of an idle and unsettled poor were produced to challenge this view of an ordered society in which a subservient poor deferred to the elite; any such images would simply have been found too disturbing. In these circumstances, there appears to have been no call to develop such an iconography; rather, representations of the beggar remained prescriptive, showing a figure both subservient and deserving.

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<sup>35</sup> Barrell 2005: 68.

<sup>36</sup> Anon. 1760: 37.

<sup>37</sup> Ticklecheek 1797: 31.

<sup>38</sup> The illustration to Ryland's text is based on Laroon's *The London Beggar* (figure 1.10).

## Section Two: Classifying the beggar

Far from validating the new harsh social attitudes towards mendicity, such developments in beggar imagery as did take place derive their logic from a very different, non-moralistic context. The context in question was the new literary genre that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century that James Gregory has termed the 'eccentric biography'.<sup>39</sup> Texts in this genre featured men and women who had either exhibited transgressive social behaviour or deviated from the physical norm; among their number were several well-known London beggars whose brief biographies were accompanied by illustrations. Victoria Carroll has argued that eccentricity became, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, 'a key concept' for making sense of the ordering of the natural and social world.<sup>40</sup> The biographies can thus be seen as contributing to the "'scientific" impulse of cataloguing and sorting' that Deborah Nord identifies in the same period.<sup>41</sup> The texts adopt a taxonomic approach in which the beggar as deviant becomes an exhibit in these 'paper museums'.<sup>42</sup> However, I argue that visual representations of the beggar are never included in the biographies for their curiosity value alone but serve wider functions.

Earlier attempts to classify the beggar had placed the figure in a hierarchical order. In the pioneering statistical table compiled by Gregory King in 1688 to show both the size of social groups and the distribution of income, the beggar occupied the lowest position for both rank and income.<sup>43</sup> The magistrate and former merchant Patrick Colquhoun referred back to King's figures when he produced his own similar table of the social structure of England and Wales in 1806; he ranked the nation according to occupation and income in order to demonstrate 'the proud height' to which the nation had now arrived.<sup>44</sup> Once again, the vagrant came at the base of this hierarchy, with only the pensioners of Chelsea, Greenwich and Chatham coming below. Although a statistical table is of course ostensibly an objective record of factual information, placing the beggar in the same category as such types as rogues, thieves and those 'in and out of prisons', makes an implicit moral judgement on the figure.<sup>45</sup> In this respect Colquhoun's work demonstrates that any reference to the mendicant was inevitably bound up with contemporary social and moral

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<sup>39</sup> Gregory 2006: 73.

<sup>40</sup> Carroll 2007: 226.

<sup>41</sup> Nord 1988: 164.

<sup>42</sup> Carroll 2007: 264.

<sup>43</sup> For King's table, see Porter 1991: 366-7.

<sup>44</sup> Colquhoun 1806: 25.

<sup>45</sup> Colquhoun's table is reproduced in Hilton 2006: 127-8.



values. As befitted examples of political arithmetic, the statistical tables of neither King nor Colquhoun were illustrated; the rogues and beggars whom they classify were thus given no visual representation.

A new development at the end of the eighteenth century, however, saw the publication of a catalogue that did link a hierarchical classification of society to visual material. In 1793, Henry Bromley produced *A Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits* in response to the enthusiasm for collecting prints of notable British figures that had followed the publication of James Granger's *The Biographical History of England from Egbert the Great to the Revolution* (1769). Although also unillustrated, Bromley's catalogue listed the known prints of British notables from the ninth century to the present day which together made up a 'well-chosen collection of engraved Portraits'.<sup>46</sup> Bromley organised his catalogue chronologically by reign, subdividing the material for each period into ten separate categories that classified society in a social hierarchy. In Class I were 'The Royal Families' while at the bottom, Class X comprised 'Phenomena, Convicts, and Persons otherwise remarkable'. This latter category was based not on income or social rank but on deviance, both physical and social; here, for the period 1761 to 1792, Bromley listed portraits of such figures as giants and criminals but also five engravings of beggars, three of whom were identified by name. The beggar was now classed among the 'remarkable'.

The later eccentric biographies are compilations of those deemed 'remarkable', not just from Bromley's lowest category but from all walks of life. They classify society on the basis of differentiation, using the categories of norm and deviant.<sup>47</sup> One of the earliest examples, James Caulfield's *Portraits, Memoirs and Characters, of Remarkable Persons* (1790-1795), not only gave accounts of the notorious, those exhibiting 'the deviation of nature', and 'Remarkable Characters' but was also illustrated with some of the prints to which Bromley had only referred. Caulfield featured two beggars: James Turner, 'an Aged Beggar' said to be ninety-three years old, and the literary figure, Bampfylde-Moore Carew, the King of the Beggars, who was included as a character of 'peculiar notoriety'.<sup>48</sup> The beggar here joined the criminal, the deviant and the remarkable in prints that represent, as Marcia Pointon has argued, 'the antithesis of polite society'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bromley 1793: v.

<sup>47</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault argued for the rise of differentiation based on the norm and the deviant in the eighteenth century. (Foucault 1991: 184)

<sup>48</sup> Caulfield 1819: I, vi; IV, iv.

<sup>49</sup> Pointon 1993: 92.

Although Caulfield's four volumes, originally retailing at fifty shillings, were produced for the rich, the eccentric biographies also appeared as single volumes and in serial format, so reaching a wider audience that, according to Gregory, would have included those he terms 'the bourgeois family and its children', or in other words, the urban middle class.<sup>50</sup> At one level, the biographies, some of which also featured abnormal events in the natural world, served to 'excite public curiosity' as Caulfield had promised, and so provide entertainment.<sup>51</sup> However, by representing the deviant, they also functioned to reassure the middle-class family that they themselves formed part of the cultural norm. The biographies thereby provided what Stallybrass and White have termed 'the boundary constructions necessary to collective identity'.<sup>52</sup> Significantly for the purposes of this study, illustrations to the biographies included depictions of well-known London beggars; at least six different representations of the beggarwoman Ann Siggs appeared in biographies published between about 1800 and 1814, for example.

Almost all the London beggars who feature in these biographies appear as entertaining curiosities rather than as a potential menace. The legless Samuel Horsey 'excited the curiosity of great numbers of people daily passing through the most crowded avenues of this metropolis' as he propelled himself around on 'a wooden seat constructed in the manner of a rocking-horse, and assisted by a pair of crutches' (1803: figure 5.8).<sup>53</sup> Ann Siggs, who is always shown with crutches, gained fame both for her unusual cleanliness and for her multi-coloured clothing: 'blue, red, green, and yellow, alternately adorn her'.<sup>54</sup> The blind Thomas Sugden walked the streets of London with pigeons perched on his head and shoulders, an eccentric rather than a sturdy beggar.<sup>55</sup> These beggars deviate both from the physical norm in their disabilities and from a social norm that valorised industry. Even as curiosities, however, these well-known beggars do not escape a moralising gloss; thus Horsey, as manifestly unable to work, is clearly deserving and appeals 'to us in the strongest terms for our benevolence', in contrast to the many impostors found on the London streets.<sup>56</sup> Ann Siggs is 'not only remarkable but exemplary' in her 'resignation to the will of Providence'.<sup>57</sup> Such comments reinforce the moral boundaries for the reader. Unlike More's tracts, however, the biographies do not equate deviance with delinquency.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Wonderful Magazine* (1793), for example, cost sixpence a month. (Gregory 2006: 80)

<sup>51</sup> Caulfield 1819: I, v.

<sup>52</sup> Stallybrass and White 1986: 193.

<sup>53</sup> Anon. 1803: 332.

<sup>54</sup> Parry 1805.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory 2006: 74; Lemoine 1814: II, 252.

<sup>57</sup> Granger 1802-1808: II, 1089.

One of the London beggars featured in the eccentric biographies strikes a more ambivalent note, however. The black beggar Toby, who appears in Parry's *Extraordinary Characters of the Nineteenth Century* (1805), is said to have lost all his toes while serving on a merchant ship. Although genuinely disabled, he exploited his condition by feigning ignorance of the English language, 'the better to obtain charity as a distressed Stranger'. Moreover, it is alleged that while appearing 'bent double by excessive pain and fatigue' by day, at night he walks upright once more, 'with as firm a step as the nature of his loss can sustain'. Toby is of course an example not only of social and physical deviance but also of racial difference. Attitudes towards black people were ambivalent at this time; the idea of the 'lazy African' was longstanding, but the abolition movement that began in the 1780s was evidence of a more humanitarian attitude.<sup>58</sup> It has been estimated that several thousand people of African descent were living in London at the end of the eighteenth century, many of them ex-slaves who had been transported to Britain after earning their freedom by fighting on the British side in the American war.<sup>59</sup> Many of these ended up begging on London's streets; Temi Odumosu finds 'the 'Black' beggars of London' to have been viewed as curiosities but also as a menace.<sup>60</sup> Although the latter view is evident in the description of Toby's manipulation of his audience to obtain alms, Parry's account is not without sympathy. Not only is Toby 'unfortunate', but charity to him may be 'highly necessary'. Indeed, Parry expresses astonishment that the merchants whom the 'unfortunate Negroes' serve have not instituted a charity to support those maimed in their service.<sup>61</sup> Parry's account thus voices both suspicion of the black as other, and compassion for his plight.<sup>62</sup>

Despite such expressions of pity, the visual representations of Toby and Ann Siggs are not obviously sympathetic depictions (1804: figure 5.9; 1803: figure 5.10). In this respect they differ from earlier depictions of notable London beggars, such as that by Nathaniel Dance of 'A Beggar who frequented the Bird Cage Walk' in which the beggar appears a dignified subject, engaging the viewer with a direct gaze, although here situated in a rural rather than an urban setting (c. 1761-1800: figure 5.11). Of the London beggars illustrated in the biographies, only Samuel Horsey, as the one indisputably deserving mendicant,

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<sup>58</sup> Rönnbäck 2014: 128.

<sup>59</sup> Myers 1996: 25; Walvin 1971: 17-8.

<sup>60</sup> Odumosu 2017: 203.

<sup>61</sup> Parry 1805 (unpaginated).

<sup>62</sup> The only images of London's black beggars that I have identified are of well-known individuals. As well as Toby, John Thomas Smith depicts the black beggars, Joseph Johnson and Charles McGee, in *Vagabondiana* (discussed in Section Four of this chapter), while Billy Waters appears in prints from the 1820s. The very small number of these images compared to the actual presence of men of African descent on the streets of London is further proof that depictions of the beggar served a symbolic purpose, rather than representing the reality of mendicant life.

appears to be represented in an everyday context, actively confronting the viewer in the act of begging in a London street. By contrast, Toby and Siggs appear more as exhibits, isolated figures shown as objects of curiosity to be gazed at rather than sympathised with. Presenting them in profile both distances and dehumanises these figures. Toby's image in particular verges on caricature; his thick lips and exaggerated bent pose conform to the depiction of blacks in Georgian satire as discussed by Odumosu.<sup>63</sup> By objectifying the figures of both Toby and Siggs, their illustrations offer a new way of visualising the London beggar as deviant.

From my research, Toby appears to be the closest the eccentric biographies come to representing the rogue beggar. Although Bampfylde-Moore Carew features regularly as one who deceived by the many disguises he adopted, he was a literary figure from the previous century. An early publication, Kirby's *Museum* (1803), does refer to the mythical delinquent beggars of St Giles's, at whose meetings 'the blind could see – the dumb speak – the deaf hear – and the lame begin to walk!', but such figures remain confined to the imagination.<sup>64</sup> In representing these London beggars, the biographies restrict their accounts to those who offer no serious threat; to do otherwise would be to excite fear rather than curiosity. Indeed, scholars have suggested that representations of the individual poor could function to alleviate rather than create anxiety. Solkin has argued with reference to David Wilkie's work that representing the poor as individuals served to deny them a collective identity, so defusing any potential threat.<sup>65</sup> In this case, the threat is that of radicalism, but the supposed criminality of the vagrant figure also created fear among the well-to-do. Furthermore, categorising the beggar can be seen as a means of increasing knowledge with a view to control; Carroll has argued that the eccentric biographies functioned to contain 'liminal behaviors by subjecting them to rational taxonomic order'.<sup>66</sup>

The desire to control deviance was also apparent in the moral reform movement. However, whereas that project called for active intervention and surveillance, the biographies distanced their readers from the deviant beggar by presenting the figure as an object of curiosity, rather than one in need of reform. Both strategies can nevertheless be read as having been prompted by middle-class anxieties, either about the problem of poverty as represented by the mendicant, or about the moral and social norms from which the beggar deviated. In both cases, the figure of the beggar enabled the middle class to

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<sup>63</sup> Odumosu 2017: 29.

<sup>64</sup> Anon. 1803: 112.

<sup>65</sup> Solkin 2008: 34.

<sup>66</sup> Carroll 2007: 265.

assert their identity in terms of difference, whether from one of the feckless poor or from one whose behaviour transgressed the social norm. Paradoxically, however, as Stallybrass and White have argued, this sense of difference from the low other can in fact engender an intense fascination with the figure: 'what is excluded at the overt level of identity-formation is productive of new objects of desire'.<sup>67</sup> Their very difference thus made the beggar an object of intense interest, as is evident in the biographies.

The classification of the deviant in the eccentric biographies has been linked to the genre of the London Cries.<sup>68</sup> This well-established tradition had been from the start, as Mark Bills has argued, an attempt 'to categorize and list its subjects'.<sup>69</sup> Where the eccentric biographies classified according to ideas of norm and deviant, however, the later Cries emphasised a moral and social hierarchy for the benefit of the juvenile audience to which they were by then often addressed. The 'Little Readers' of the anonymous *Cries of London*, published in 1815, read about a metropolis where society is ordered and classified, from 'the Lord Mayor in his gilded coach' to 'the poor, shivering beggar squalid with want'. In the same text, the didactic commentary warns the readers not to buy from the ballad singer: 'Never encourage laziness, my young friends'.<sup>70</sup> The Cries differ further from the eccentric biographies insofar as they typically represent types rather than named individuals. Moreover, the later Cries restrict their types to the lower orders whereas the biographies number among their deviants not only London beggars but also English aristocrats. Neither the Cries nor the biographies make the beggar a specific focus, although in the Cries the difference between hawker and beggar is often blurred. In *Itinerant Traders of London* (1804), for example, William Marshall Craig notes how match-sellers frequently 'sell and beg alternately'.<sup>71</sup> Despite their many differences, however, both genres appealed to the public curiosity about the low other.<sup>72</sup>

To conclude, in the early years of the nineteenth century, illustrations to the eccentric biographies created a new form of beggar imagery by representing notable London beggars as exhibited specimens in a collection of deviants. The biographies have been seen as part of a wider attempt in these years to classify the social and natural worlds, using knowledge to both order and control. They offered a new model of classification based on ideas of

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<sup>67</sup> Stallybrass and White 1986: 25.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory 2006: 81.

<sup>69</sup> Bills 2003: 35.

<sup>70</sup> Anon. 1815: Chapter 1; Chapter 3, p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Craig's *Itinerant Traders* was published, unpaginated, in Richard Phillips' *Modern London* (1804).

<sup>72</sup> Rowlandson's *Characteristic Sketches of the Lower Orders*, published in 1820, offers a late example of the classification of types found in the Cries. The fifty-four plates depict London's hawkers, often as comic figures, but without textual commentary.

norm and deviant, rather than the traditional hierarchical ordering of society. Their normative model would play an important role in identity-formation, reassuring the middle classes of the normative status of their own beliefs and values. The representations of London beggars in the biographies thus functioned not simply to satisfy the curiosity of their middle-class readers, but also to establish the social and moral boundaries on which they based their identity. In these texts, the beggars' eccentricity was to be wondered at rather than condemned.

### Section Three: Representing the plight of the mendicant poor

The moral attitudes of the middle class, as identified in the opening section, found visual representation in the very few graphic images from the 1790s and early 1800s that represented the suffering of those forced to beg. In these images, the focus falls not on the plight of the poor, for whom there is little evidence of sympathy, but rather on the abuse of power by those in positions of authority. Although the 1790s saw the first systematic collection of data about London's mendicants, the general view persisted that poverty was the result of the moral failings of the poor. Only in those satires that depict the disabled war veteran, now forced to beg, is there evidence of sympathy for the mendicant. This section will argue that the graphic prints depicting the beggar's distress that were produced in these years are not radical images but rather function to provide ideological justification for the attitudes of the middle class.

Enquiries into vagrancy were not new; together with poor relief, this social problem had been the subject of parliamentary enquiries since the 1770s. In 1796, however, the philanthropist Matthew Martin began conducting private research into London's vagrant poor. Although he received funding from the Home Office in 1802, his early research was carried out with the support of the newly-founded Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (the Bettering Society). Martin set up a scheme whereby donors could purchase tickets to be given to beggars who could then exchange them for cash at the Society's offices in return for answering questions about themselves. Joanna Innes sees Martin's systematic data collection as one example of a new 'empirical, would-be 'scientific' mind-set'; such enquiries aimed to get 'some kind of empirical grip' on social problems and to assert some form of control.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the first report of the Bettering Society states its aim as being to 'make the inquiry into all that concerns the

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<sup>73</sup> Innes 2009: 167, 157.

POOR [...] a SCIENCE; let us investigate *practically*, and upon *system*'. The pioneering nature of such enquiries is clear; their 'investigation into facts and existing circumstances' had never before 'been fairly and fully made'.<sup>74</sup>

Martin's enquiries under the auspices of the Bettering Society were an attempt to influence public opinion by establishing the facts about vagrancy with the aim of dispelling the myth that all beggars were idle. He reported on the eagerness with which many beggars accepted the employment the Society could offer them, in order to prove 'the injustice of the too general opprobrium, passed on the whole body of Beggars', and to demonstrate that 'every Beggar is not necessarily an idle delinquent'.<sup>75</sup> On the contrary, 'beggary' was often 'the effect of misfortune, rather than of choice'.<sup>76</sup> When in 1815 a parliamentary select committee was appointed to investigate the increase of mendicity in the metropolis, Martin was able to present his findings as evidence. However, although the committee's report, published in 1816, found clear evidence of 'real objects of compassion' among London's much increased begging population, it also highlighted 'the idle and profligate vagrants' who created such an 'intolerable inconvenience' to Londoners.<sup>77</sup> In short, despite Martin's evidence, the stereotypical view of the idle beggar persisted.

Martin's graphic accounts of the beggars' suffering had no visual parallel. He can describe the 'acute and aggravated suffering' endured by 'this most miserable class of human beings' who comprise the beggars of London.<sup>78</sup> However, as Barrell argues in his aforementioned discussion of the cottage prints of the 1790s, 'the polite classes' insisted on imagining the poor as contented.<sup>79</sup> Cottage-door scenes of domestic harmony took on a heightened political significance during the French wars when they functioned as loyalist propaganda to contrast with representations of the suffering of the French people following the overthrow of the monarchy.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, to represent the English poor as less than happy was thought to foster discontent. A correspondent to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, a periodical that, according to William Stafford, was 'explicitly addressed to the social elite', gave as his belief that any statement about the suffering of the poor was 'the language of sedition', 'circulated to disturb the minds of the lower classes, and delude them to forget

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<sup>74</sup> *Reports 1798-1800*: I, xii.

<sup>75</sup> Martin 1812: 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> Martin 1803: 12.

<sup>77</sup> *New Monthly Magazine*, December 1815: 432.

<sup>78</sup> Martin 1812: 7, 12.

<sup>79</sup> Barrell 2005: 54.

<sup>80</sup> Such a contrast is made by the satirical prints, *Citizen Coupe tête in his misery* and *John Bull in his glory* (1793). (BM 1865,1111.2011; Library of Congress LC-USZC4-2898)

that they are happy'.<sup>81</sup> Nor, according to this writer, did such representations accord with reality; given the 'numberless' charitable donations and 'the almost infinite variety of employments in which the labours of the poor are required', it was inconceivable that England's poor could be other than content.<sup>82</sup> Only one exceptional correspondent to the magazine recognised that the elite 'chuse to decide on what *ought to be*' the feelings of the poor, not what 'those feelings *actually are*'.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, in visual imagery the perception of how the poor 'ought to be' prevailed.

The restrictions that these pictorial conventions placed on artists are evident in the illustrations to a long poem published in 1803 that referred to the suffering of the rural poor. *Cottage Pictures; or, the Poor*, by Samuel Jackson Pratt, describes the poverty the author had discovered on his travels around the country. Men had been reduced to 'wretched paupers', to 'haggard shapes and forms' and 'spectres thin of hollow penury'.<sup>84</sup> However, no such spectral figures appear in Philip James de Loutherbourg's illustrations: in his plate depicting a destitute family facing the workhouse, both parents and children appear well-dressed and well-fed (figure 5.12). The focus falls on the emotional distress of the mother at the prospect of being separated from her children rather than on any physical evidence of extreme poverty. Significantly, in Pratt's poem poverty is seen as predominantly a moral problem, the direct consequence of the irresponsibility and corruption of the rich as 'the ancient customs fail'.<sup>85</sup> The artist's failure to depict these paupers as 'wretched' is further evidence that any such representation would not accord with the contented poor of the elite reader's imagination.

The plight of the English poor would only find graphic representation in a small number of satirical prints produced in these years. However, as in Pratt's poem, the targets of their satire were the wealthy. Several of Thomas Bewick's vignettes, for example, make an explicit critique of the landed elite whom, as noted earlier, the artist described in the *Memoir* that he wrote towards the end of his life, as now neglecting their paternalistic responsibilities to the poor.<sup>86</sup> Written in the 1820s, this comment makes clear the transitional nature of the period through which the artist lived, from 1753 to 1828. Bewick had previously given visual expression to such a critique in a vignette in his *History of British Birds* (1797, 1804) that depicts a peg leg beggar gnawing at a bone, watched avidly

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<sup>81</sup> Stafford 2008: 47.

<sup>82</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1793: 34.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*: June 1793: 325.

<sup>84</sup> Pratt 1803: 14, 19.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*: 18.

<sup>86</sup> Uglow 2006: 360.



by his dog (1799: figure 5.13).<sup>87</sup> The figure is seated outside the wall of a country estate, on top of which Bewick places a peacock, the emblem of pride. In so doing, he makes an unmistakable criticism of the wealthy gentry who have denied the beggar aid.

An earlier version of this vignette had appeared in Bewick's *Select Fables* (1784), where the artist had included the figure of a dependant leaving the estate, having been unsuccessful in securing a position (figure 5.14). A parallel is drawn between the rejection he had received and the beggar's lack of concern for his dog's hunger, in order to point to the moral that 'tis misery to depend upon patrons'.<sup>88</sup> The indifference shown to dependants is here seen as an inevitable feature of a cruel world rather than as a social problem. Diana Donald has argued that the later vignette also represents 'a kind of improvised fable' that points to the social injustice of the wider world.<sup>89</sup> Both a fable and an emblem offer a universal moral truth: Bewick's later vignette similarly offers a generalised rather than a specific social critique. In the moral context of a fable, the unusually graphic representation of a starving beggar, a far from idealised figure, becomes acceptable as it would not have been in an illustration to Pratt's poem. Moreover, the tiny scale of the woodcut and its position in the text as a tailpiece, give it less prominence than a full-page illustration. Certainly, contemporary reviews found no fault with Bewick's image; rather his vignettes for *British Birds* received praise for their 'ingenious and entertaining variety'.<sup>90</sup> If it were noticed, this particular vignette would presumably have met with the approval of its middle-class readers for its critique of a negligent landed elite.

Bewick's attack on this class was representative of a widely-held view. As Innes has observed, in the late eighteenth century the blame for social problems tended to be laid at the door of the governing classes and their faulty public policy.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Bob Harris, writing about British newspapers of the eighteenth century, draws attention to the persistent vein of criticism of the nobility, who were attacked for their luxurious lifestyles and political corruption. Such attacks can be read as an attempt to assert the moral superiority of the papers' largely middle-class readership, not least given that, as Harris further notes, such critique of the elite existed alongside praise for 'individuals of middling rank'. The papers only praised the nobility when they showed themselves to be 'benevolent lords of the traditional countryside' or 'patrons or supporters of charity or enterprises that

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<sup>87</sup> Bewick 1826: 331.

<sup>88</sup> Bewick 1820: 66.

<sup>89</sup> Donald 2007: 122.

<sup>90</sup> *British Critic*, September 1805: 293.

<sup>91</sup> Innes 2009: 218.

were often controlled or created by men of middle rank'. If they defined themselves against the aristocracy, however, the middle class also defined themselves against the lower orders who were represented in the papers as either criminals or as 'proper objects for the enlightened benevolence or intervention on the part of their betters'.<sup>92</sup>

These middle-class attitudes are exemplified in a popular print published in 1802. Like *Humanity's Cot*, discussed earlier, *The Beggar Girl* is a crude print that serves as an illustration to a ballad (figure 5.15). The text identifies the young girl as one who, though forced by family circumstances to beg, longs for the philanthropic intervention that would enable her to work: 'Fain would I learn both to Knit and to Sew'. 'Call me not Lazy-back Beggar', she insists, thereby offering an explicit contrast to the stereotypical figure of the idle beggar. She begs for charity from the 'kind Gentlemen Friends of Humanity', beseeching them, as they 'revel so careless and free', not to forget those forced to beg. The background figures in this urban scene illustrate her words: the 'kind' gentleman standing at the window watches as his servant takes food to the girl, while the disappearing coach represents the gentry's life of pleasure. If it is the gentleman's empty coach, now going away, then it implies that wealth and social responsibility are not mutually exclusive; if, on the other hand, it belongs to one of the 'careless' pleasure-seeking gentry, then it condemns their irresponsible attitude in ignoring the beggar girl. In either case, the ballad endorses the charitable acts of the gentry.

The figure of the beggar was also used to attack corruption among those who served as members of parish vestries. These were the meetings of rate-paying households that supervised the overseers responsible for the administration of poor relief. The intensification of the debate over Poor Law reform in the 1790s had led to strident criticism of these bodies; in 1793, for example, a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* attacked the 'savage cruelty' of 'rulers of parish-meetings, who care not how they squeeze the wretches that are so unhappy as to stand in need of their allowance'.<sup>93</sup> In the anonymous print, *A Vestry Dinner*, the vestry members feast voraciously while a thin, ragged man is pushed away as he begs, 'Spare me a Bit your Worships' (1795: figure 5.16). His liminal position in a doorway is shared by the begging family in Rowlandson's *A Select Vestry* who are shown being sent towards the workhouse while the vestry members drink their wine in comfort (1806: figure 5.17). In both prints, the prosperous but corrupt members use the poor rates to satisfy their own greed rather than to meet the needs of the

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<sup>92</sup> Harris 1998: 9, 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1793: 35.

poor. However, the beggars remain of secondary interest as the token poor whose emaciated figures and ragged attire function as a contrast to the gross bodies of the vestry members. Both prints satirise the corruption of the well-to-do rather than plead the plight of the poor.

Despite their depictions of the suffering of the poor, these satirical prints are not a call for greater social equality. Barrell has commented on the absence of radical material in the visual satire of the time, contrasting the abundant radical literary material published in the 1790s with the very few anti-government prints in the same vein that were produced in these years. He suggests that this could be because 'plebeian radical publishers could not afford the services of professional caricaturists, or the expenses of printmaking'.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, print publishers would be aware of the risks of publishing radical material at a time when radical activities were being heavily penalised. The beggar images may criticise those in power, but they do not challenge the existing social order. Rather, they suggest that if social responsibilities were met, the poor would have no cause to suffer; they would be the contented folk of the elite imagination.

Nevertheless, fear of discontent among the poor remained an ever-present concern for their social superiors. This fear is given graphic illustration in a satirical print by Gillray, *Substitutes for Bread* (1795: figure 5.18). In December 1795, in response to the food crisis of that year, the government had legalised measures to reduce the consumption of wheat, including making bread flour from mixed grains and potatoes. Gillray's print shows ministers of state gorging on the guineas raised by taxation while a notice on the wall lists their 'Substitutes for Bread', not here potatoes but 'turtle soup' and 'champaign'. Meanwhile the begging poor, glimpsed through the window, hold up petitions bearing messages such as, 'Grant us the Crumbs which drop from your Table'. Despite the ferocity of Gillray's attack on the hypocritical governing classes, the suffering poor are not shown as objects of sympathy. By depicting them in revolutionary bonnets-rouges, the print gives expression to the widespread fear of the poor as agents of disorder. In Gillray's print, as in Rowlandson's *Select Vestry*, a desperate poor remains safely distanced, glimpsed only through windows or forcefully ejected from the space of the gourmandising vestry members. Seen as a mob, the suffering poor are here objects of fear.

One category of suffering mendicant was depicted in the satirical prints in a uniformly positive light, however: namely, the amputee war veteran. Simon Parkes, writing about the literary depiction of 'the Broken Soldier', argues that the figure stands as a trope for

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<sup>94</sup> Barrell 2007.

patriotic service and sacrifice; his role as a beggar is therefore secondary.<sup>95</sup> The peg leg figure had long been associated with traditional, popular merrymaking but, as a begging veteran he is an object of pathos, not comedy.<sup>96</sup> Contemporary viewers are likely to have read such figures as veterans. Donald has suggested that Bewick's peg leg beggar may have been one, for example: the amputee in Gillray's satirical print, *A new way to pay the National-Debt*, most certainly is (1786: figure 5.20).<sup>97</sup> Here, an obsequious Pitt hands a money bag to the King whose pockets already overflow with guineas, while a military band plays, the musicians' pockets similarly stuffed with coins. In sharp contrast to this display of greed, the veteran sits begging to the left. The juxtaposition of his noble suffering with the harsh caricature both disturbs the viewer and intensifies the social critique. Once again, the object of the satire is the wealthy, here the royal family, oblivious to the beggar's plight.

The most brutal image of the plight of the destitute war veteran appears in Gillray's later work. Large-scale mobilisation for the French wars from 1793 onwards had made war a more immediate presence for many families, whether directly through enlistment or indirectly through the medium of print; Jenny Uglow estimates that men from one in five families were directly involved in the war.<sup>98</sup> Despite the prevalence during these years of what Philip Shaw terms 'the established discourses of patriotic fervour and bellicose pride', a more critical note manifested itself both in anti-war poetry and in satirical prints in the 1790s.<sup>99</sup> In 1793 Gillray produced a narrative sequence, *John Bull's Progress*, in which John Bull moves from a life of domestic content to enlistment and the battlefield, only to return, blind and missing a leg, to find his family reduced to penury, horrified by his wretched appearance (figure 5.21). Unable to work, his house now stripped bare and his family starving, he faces the threat of life as a mendicant. Gillray's satire can be read as an indictment of a ruling class that sends men to war but cares little for their subsequent welfare or that of their families. However, as Simon Parkes has observed, *John Bull's Progress* remains an exceptional image in its brutality.<sup>100</sup> Certainly Gillray's print offers the most graphic representation of the beggar's suffering from this period that I have found.

Other satirists who represented the amputee begging veteran chose a more sentimental mode, softening the signs of distress. In the same year that Gillray's harsh satire appeared,

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<sup>95</sup> Parkes 2013: 205-206.

<sup>96</sup> The peg leg fiddler can still be found as late as 1795 in Isaac Cruikshank's *May Day* (figure 5.19).

<sup>97</sup> Donald 2007: 122.

<sup>98</sup> Uglow 2014: 1.

<sup>99</sup> Shaw 2013: 127.

<sup>100</sup> Parkes 2013: 204.

Isaac Cruikshank produced *He would be a soldier*, a similar narrative sequence depicting John Bull's progress from contented farmer to soldier and finally to disabled beggar, his family following behind (1793: figure 5.22). However, his family are not the haggard wretches shown in Gillray's final scene; his wife is a pretty ballad seller and his children neatly dressed. Cruikshank could even find humour in the veteran's plight: in *The Beauties of War!!* (1799), a double amputee responds to a polite 'How are you?' with, 'Tolerably hearty thank you, all that is left of me'.<sup>101</sup> The replacement of Gillray's graphic images of suffering by these less disturbing satires may be partly explained by the secret government pension awarded to Gillray in 1797; from that time his attacks on government policies ceased. However, even as a humorous figure, the amputee veteran remained an object of universal sympathy, signifying the suffering caused by war.

Despite the evidence of empirical enquiries, poverty continued to be seen as a moral rather than a socio-economic problem in these years. The very few satirical prints that represent the wretched state of the poor do so not to highlight their suffering but to attack both the landed elite and the corrupt and uncharitable among the gentry who have abdicated their moral responsibilities. The prints thus give visual representation to the attitudes of their middle-class audience whose attacks on the moral failings of the rich served to reinforce their own sense of superiority. Preferring to imagine the poor as both subservient and content, this audience did not wish to be disturbed by graphic representations of the beggar's physical distress. The brutality of Gillray's satires thus remained exceptional in a period that saw a hardening of attitudes towards the poor.

#### Section Four: The London beggar in the post-war decade

This final section will focus on representations of the London beggar produced by John Thomas Smith and the Cruikshank brothers in the decade following the end of the Napoleonic wars. In their different ways these images mark a decisive shift in public attitudes towards the beggar as the suppression of mendicity increasingly took priority over the relief of distress. Smith's etchings of notable London beggars in his *Vagabondiana* (1817) give a picturesque view of figures he feared would soon disappear from the streets of the city. In complete contrast, the comic illustrations produced by Robert and George Cruikshank create a visual representation of the carefree world of the sturdy beggar that was new to British art. Despite the very different character of these two sets of images,

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<sup>101</sup> Yale University Library 799.10.12.01++.

both are informed by the further hardening of attitudes towards the beggar that took place in this decade.

The early years of the nineteenth century had seen moves towards a more active policing of vagrancy. Following the establishment of the Bath Society for the Suppression of Vagrants, Street-Beggars and Impostors in 1805, similar organisations were founded elsewhere. The success of these societies led to demands for similar action to be taken in the capital. In 1814, for example, a commentator in *The Eccentric Magazine* noted that, whereas 'Bath has most admirably *expunged* from their society itinerant beggars', London continued to be the city 'most pestered with beggars'.<sup>102</sup> The following year, the House of Commons select committee on mendicity estimated the mendicant population of London to be in excess of 15,000.<sup>103</sup> The committee's call for action to distinguish the deserving beggar from the impostor would lead to the founding of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity (the Mendicity Society) in 1818.

The Society's first report reveals a new emphasis on forcibly suppressing mendicity in the capital. Using the ticket system pioneered by the earlier Bettering Society, the Mendicity Society offered small sums of money and, from 1822, short-term employment to those beggars it deemed worthy. However, it also employed its own constables to patrol the capital in an attempt 'to clear the streets of sturdy beggars and known impostors'. Furthermore, the Society extended its surveillance operations by investigating the moral status of supplicants: 'let investigation always precede relief'. The tone of the Society's report is admonitory: 'it cannot be too often asserted, or too strongly impressed upon the public mind, that INDISCRIMINATE ALMSGIVING IS NOT CHARITY'.<sup>104</sup> This marks a shift from the more sympathetic tone of the reports of the Bettering Society some twenty-five years earlier. Attitudes had hardened; indeed, writing about the Mendicity Society, the historian Lynn MacKay argues that by the mid-1820s, 'detecting and punishing the unworthy became the great justification for the charity's existence'. As a result, it became increasingly difficult for supplicants to prove themselves worthy.<sup>105</sup>

Published the year before the Society was founded, *Vagabondiana* stands as a record of this pivotal moment in public attitudes towards the beggar. In his Preface, Smith acknowledges that 'beggary, of late, particularly for the last six years, had become so dreadful in London' that 'the more active interference of the legislature' had become

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<sup>102</sup> Lemoine 1814: II, 253.

<sup>103</sup> Roberts 1991: 203.

<sup>104</sup> *First Report* 1819: 16-17; 13; 12.

<sup>105</sup> MacKay 1997: 42.

inevitable. Fearing that such interference would see the removal from the streets of some of the more 'curious characters' among the metropolitan beggars, Smith resolved to record them. The result was a collection of etchings of 'the most remarkable' London mendicants, together with a brief history of mendicity by the antiquarian Francis Douce, and Smith's own accounts of the figures represented. Costing three guineas, the volume was aimed at the upper end of the market.<sup>106</sup> Like his *Ancient Topography of London* published two years earlier, discussed in Chapter Three, Smith's work was an antiquarian exercise. Where the earlier volume had surveyed London's ancient buildings, some ripe for demolition, *Vagabondiana* surveyed London's beggars as a species soon to vanish, either as a result of being 'compelled to industry' or of being sent to the workhouse.<sup>107</sup> Although Smith views the beggars as curiosities, Douce takes a more hard-headed approach; he welcomes the suppression of mendicity as clearing London's streets 'from the many public and disgusting nuisances' so that relief could be directed to 'the real objects of charity and compassion'.<sup>108</sup> Here Douce anticipates the twin aims of the Mendicity Society.

Although *Vagabondiana* shares features of the eccentric biographies and London Cries, it differs from them in significant ways. It similarly categorises the socially excluded in order to both give the impression of control and to address public curiosity; as Smith notes, 'few persons, particularly those in elevated life, can witness, or even entertain a true idea of the various modes by which the lowest classes gain a livelihood'.<sup>109</sup> Like the Cries, *Vagabondiana* has a nostalgic appeal, offering as it does a record of figures who were vanishing from London's streets. At least half of Smith's beggars plied some form of trade, whether selling ballads or toys. However, whereas the Cries represented generic types, Smith's subjects are known individuals, many identified by name. William Frasier, for example, is included as one of the many veterans who had been demobilised at the end of the war and could now be found begging on London's streets.<sup>110</sup> His 'allowance' being inadequate to support his family, he used the sale of bootlaces as a pretext for begging.<sup>111</sup> For all that they are 'remarkable', Smith's beggars are not identified as phenomena to be classified with freaks of nature like their counterparts in the eccentric biographies; rather

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<sup>106</sup> *Vagabondiana* was advertised at three guineas in 1820. (*Edinburgh Monthly Review*, June 1820: 737) A second edition did not appear until 1874, suggesting the book had only a limited appeal.

<sup>107</sup> Smith 1874: v.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid: 18.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid: 29.

<sup>110</sup> More than a third of a million men had been demobilised. (Colley 1996: 339)

<sup>111</sup> Smith 1874: 28.

they are dignified in the book's title as 'mendicant wanderers through the streets of London'.

Despite its debt to the eccentric biographies and the Cries, however, *Vagabondiana* remains, as a contributor to the *Monthly Review* observed, 'a singular work'.<sup>112</sup> Smith clearly felt the need to justify his choice of subject matter at a time of increased hostility to London beggars; his expressed hope that his illustrations would 'not be unamusing' acknowledges their problematic nature.<sup>113</sup> He further justifies his work by listing the many eminent artists who had also chosen to represent the beggar; among these he includes Rembrandt's many etchings of the figure. The reference is significant; the Dutch artist's etchings enjoyed considerable status at the time, being eagerly sought by connoisseurs.<sup>114</sup> Smith may have hoped that his reference to Rembrandt would not only validate but also add status to his own work.

More generally, Smith seeks to elevate his subjects by the use of a picturesque idiom. In his etching of a blind beggar, for example, the use of cross-hatching to create tonal effect contributes to the picturesque effect of the isolated figure (figure 5.23). By such means, he distances his subjects from the spectator; thus, his depiction of Samuel Horsey differs from the contextualised engraving of Horsey in Kirby's *Museum* by showing him with his back to us, transforming him into a solitary and mysterious figure (figures 5.8, 5.24). However, as James Harriman-Smith notes, Smith cannot here achieve the moral detachment of the 'pure picturesque'.<sup>115</sup> As I have argued earlier, it would not have been possible at this time to dissociate these visual representations of the beggar from the moral and social issues surrounding the figure. Smith clearly felt the need to provide a moralistic gloss for his elite readers in his own textual commentary. He censures indiscriminating almsgiving to a clearly drunk beggar: 'such are the effects of imposture, and the mischief of ill-directed benevolence'. By contrast, two industrious beggars are described as 'a meritorious pair' and 'true objects of compassion'.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, as Gregory Dart has noted, Smith's text will often expose a beggar's 'performance practice', such as a reliance on the appeal of a dancing dog. Dart argues that this creates a discrepancy between the text's adherence to the tradition of 'cautionary literature' and the picturesque images.<sup>117</sup> However, it also provides for the reader a moral context that is not to be found in the images.

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<sup>112</sup> *Monthly Review*, March 1828: 369.

<sup>113</sup> Smith 1874: v.

<sup>114</sup> Seifert 2018: 44.

<sup>115</sup> Harriman-Smith 2015: 562.

<sup>116</sup> Smith 1874: 23, 22.

<sup>117</sup> Dart 2012: 157.



Four years after the publication of *Vagabondiana*, the French artist Théodore Géricault offered a very different view of London street life. On a visit to England in 1821, Géricault made a series of twelve lithographs, *Various Subjects drawn from life*, one of which depicts a London beggar (figure 5.25). It shows an old man sprawled on the pavement outside a bakery, begging from the passers-by; in the background, London citizens go unheeding about their daily business. Although the title, *Pity the Sorrows*, references Moss's sentimental poem calling for sympathy for the beggar, the two figures seen in the window appear oblivious to the old man's plea; only the beggar's dog shows concern for his master. For elite viewers, Géricault's image would have been different from any representation of the beggar they had encountered, not only in the monumentality of the figure but also in the artist's unflinching representation of destitution. Celina Fox has made a specific contrast between Géricault's lithograph and the lightly etched and picturesque figures of *Vagabondiana*; Sean Shesgreen similarly reads the image as 'antipicturesque' and 'anti-nostalgia'.<sup>118</sup> Géricault's powerful image, in the French tradition of figure painting, had no equal in British beggar imagery.

Scholars have read this image in different ways; Shesgreen, for example, identifies the beggar as an undeserving 'sot who rolls in the gutter'.<sup>119</sup> However, I concur with Linda Nochlin's analysis in her study of the visual representation of misery in the nineteenth century. Noting the pathos of the dog's gesture, she finds the mendicant to be an object of sympathy who, although drunk, is a pitiful figure who has clearly fallen on hard times. For her, Géricault's image represents 'the immense social uncaringness of post-industrial 1820s London' as observed by a foreigner. Although Nochlin denies the image has any 'obvious moralization', her analysis supports my argument that any depiction of a beggar inevitably introduces a moral dimension.<sup>120</sup> The critique here is not of the mendicant but of the complete indifference shown by London's more affluent citizens to the suffering in their midst. Particularly shocking is the attitude of the well-dressed woman to the right who, rather than showing a female compassion, has turned her back on the beggar. Géricault's image would have made uncomfortable viewing for the print's potential buyers who were themselves members of the uncaring society the artist represents; they were, moreover, as viewers, the objects of the beggar's plea. Géricault's lithographs did not sell; this would suggest that his image proved too disturbing for the elite, who demanded that the reality of

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<sup>118</sup> Fox 1988: 65; Shesgreen 2002: 191.

<sup>119</sup> Shesgreen 2002: 190. Shesgreen does acknowledge the possibility of alternative interpretations in a footnote. (219 fn. 74)

<sup>120</sup> Nochlin 2018: 83-85.

destitution be distanced, as Smith had done with his use of the picturesque.<sup>121</sup> Géricault's bleak view of London and its poor proved to be unacceptable.

Nevertheless, the first quarter of the nineteenth century did witness a growing fascination with London low life, which manifested itself in a range of different contexts. Young upper-class men, known as Corinthians, adopted the 'flash' language, a mixture of slang and the canting terms of thieves, beggars and other members of the underclass.<sup>122</sup> As David Snowdon notes, 'upper-class bucks' dressed in shabby clothes in order 'to 'live low' in insalubrious drinking and gaming haunts'.<sup>123</sup> Rowlandson captured this vogue for imitating low life in a print that shows the 'modern man of fashion' not only speaking 'the slang language fluently' but also dressing down in coachman's attire and acquainting himself with the sports of boxing and bull-baiting in a deliberate transgression of social boundaries (1814: figure 5.26). Scholars differ in their interpretations of such behaviour: Janet Sorensen has argued that the vogue for cant had a unifying effect, suggesting that its appropriation by the Regency buck 'might have been perceived as a shared moment of Britishness'.<sup>124</sup> More plausible, however, is Nord's contention that the use of slang only served to distance the classes from each other.<sup>125</sup> Certainly the fashionable young Regency buck never lost his sense of superiority; in a satirical print of 1824 a dandy responds to a beggar's cry that he has no shoes by offering him a pear purloined from a nearby stall, thus showing his contempt not only for the beggar but for the fruit seller, too (figure 5.27). Jane Rendell, one of several scholars to have addressed the gendered aspect of the Corinthian's behaviour, argues that 'flash' constituted a private language that promoted elite male bonding, not least by excluding women.<sup>126</sup> The new urban masculinities represented by the Corinthian, along with the Dandy as the aspiring man of fashion, and the extravagantly dressed Swell, were far removed from the earlier Man of Feeling in their hard-edged attitude to the poor.

It was in the context of this subculture that visual representations of the beggar as a comic rogue made their appearance in a new development in British art. As discussed in previous chapters, the idle, comic beggar had proved a problematic figure for the graphic artist. Around 1809, however, Isaac Cruikshank engraved a frontispiece for George

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<sup>121</sup> Shesgreen 2002: 219: fn. 78.

<sup>122</sup> In Jon Bee's slang dictionary, the term 'Corinthian' applied to 'nobility and gentry of education, who join heartily in the sports of the turf and the ring'. (Bee 1823: 57)

<sup>123</sup> Snowdon 2007.

<sup>124</sup> Sorensen 2004: 438.

<sup>125</sup> Nord 1988: 173. Jane Moore has also noted that although boxing may have brought the lower orders and the 'demi-monde' together, it was viewed with distaste by the cultured middle classes. (Moore 2013: 276)

<sup>126</sup> Rendell 2002: 48.

Andrewes' *Dictionary of the Slang and Cant Languages* with the title *The Beggar's Carnival*, which attests to the new fascination with low life (figure 5.28). It depicts a thieves' kitchen whose inhabitants are unmistakably sturdy beggars; an amputee sits on the table and one of the company wields a crutch, while men and women dance, drink and gamble. Although the context for this illustration partly explains its unusual subject matter, the artist further seeks to justify his choice by claiming the figures to be 'Portraits of 12 well-known Characters of London', thus categorising them among the remarkable, deviants from the social norm. Cruikshank has here created an innovative image, apparently without precedent in British art. Although it plays to the contemporary fascination with low life, such a representation of rogue beggars appears to be exceptional for the time, which suggests it may have been a commission.

Some ten years later, Cruikshank's two sons, Robert and George, produced an illustration for Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821) that represents the beggars' world as a wholly comic scene (figure 5.29). Egan's book proved enormously popular; first published in serial form, it was reproduced as a broadside in 1822 and later dramatised, thereby reaching a far wider audience than Smith's antiquarian exercise.<sup>127</sup> *Life in London* records the 'rambles and sprees' of the young Corinthian Tom, and his two companions, as they explore the capital, visiting not only such West End attractions as the theatre at Drury Lane and the Royal Academy, but also a den of 'cadgers' (a slang term for beggars or thieves) in the slums of St Giles's. The illustration for this episode shows Tom, disguised as a beggar in order to gain entrance to the den, consorting with a ballad seller in the company of other members of the convivial fraternity. Egan's text makes clear that all the stereotypes of the fraudulent beggar can be found here, among them 'old Suke' who throws away her crutches as she descends the ladder.<sup>128</sup> Tom's masculine freedom to roam the city has given him the opportunity to visit this scene of low life as an elite spectator.

Tom's role as a disengaged voyeur is central to the function of this scene. The cadgers' den is a fantasy world where poverty and crime are presented to Egan's readers for purely comic effect. The author may recognise the den's inhabitants as a 'diabolical set of IMPOSTORS' but, instead of passing judgement, he presents them for 'the enjoyment of such a portraiture of the versatility of the human character'.<sup>129</sup> However, this scene and its illustration can only be read as comic if the reader maintains a sense of difference from the

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<sup>127</sup> Rendell 2002: 37.

<sup>128</sup> Egan 1821: 375, 378.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid: 376, 379.

figures depicted. Dart has suggested that the low-life scenes in *Life in London* could function to reassure 'the genteel inhabitants of St James's of the fundamental humanity of the denizens of St Giles' at a time of the increasing social segregation of London.<sup>130</sup> However, given the hardening of attitudes towards the beggar evident from the 1790s, this would seem unlikely; rather, it could be argued that this change in attitudes gave the reader the licence to regard the beggar as a comic other at the expense of any sense of a shared humanity. Certainly, the frontispiece to *Life in London* serves to emphasise, not obliterate, social distinctions, representing as it does the chain of social being from the King to the mendicant ballad seller (figure 5.30). Public fascination with the beggar in the early nineteenth century was based on difference, not empathy. An explanation for this phenomenon is provided by Stallybrass and White who argue that a 'zeal for reform' was often accompanied 'by a prolonged, fascinated gaze from the bourgeoisie', referring to *Life in London* to illustrate their point.<sup>131</sup> As *Vagabondiana* clearly testifies, moves to suppress the beggar had paradoxically prompted an unusual degree of interest in the figure.

Although very different from *Vagabondiana*, both in its audience and its treatment of the beggar, *Life in London* can similarly be read as a nostalgic text. Where Smith had recorded the beggars soon to disappear from London's streets, Egan celebrates the final appearance of the jovial crew. As discussed in Chapter One, this long literary tradition recounting tales of a fictitious crew of jolly beggars was still flourishing in England in the eighteenth century. Such a self-contained community, free from the restraints of law and decorum, undoubtedly held a nostalgic appeal in times of unprecedented social change, as can be seen from a review of a late revival of the play, *The Jovial Crew*, in 1819. 'We wonder', wrote a critic, 'the Societies for the Suppression of Mendicity (and other good things) do not club for the putting down of this infamous protest in favour of air, and clear liberty, and honest license, and blameless assertion of man's original blest charter of blue skies, and vagrancy, and nothing-to-do'.<sup>132</sup> Coming at the end of the long literary tradition, Egan's text offers, as Vic Gatrell has argued, 'a summation of the passing culture and of its comic tradition'.<sup>133</sup>

Although a few further representations of the world of the jolly beggars would appear over the next ten years, the Cruikshanks' illustrations of the beggars' world did not mark

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<sup>130</sup> Dart 2012: 132.

<sup>131</sup> Stallybrass and White 1986: 139.

<sup>132</sup> *Examiner*, 4 July 1819: 429.

<sup>133</sup> Gatrell 2006: 552.

the beginning of a new artistic tradition.<sup>134</sup> According to Gatrell, after the 1820s, low life becomes 'less and less funny', and was instead 'increasingly represented as a terrain of anxiety and didactic moralization'.<sup>135</sup> The sudden, brief appearance of visual representations of the comic rogue beggar can best be explained as a coming together of the particular graphic talents of the Cruikshanks with an unusual degree of interest in low life, when the public was willing not only to read about the jolly beggar but also to look at visual representations of this figure. Like Smith, the Cruikshanks catered to such public curiosity by presenting images of the mendicant, only with the difference that they employed comedy rather than the picturesque to distance their figures from the viewer.

The hardening of attitudes towards the beggar evident in the policing role of the Mendicity Society proved to be the catalyst for the production of two very different categories of beggar imagery. The fear that many notable London beggars would be removed from the streets prompted Smith to make a visual record in his *Vagabondiana*. However, the new harsh attitudes would also appear to have freed the public to now view the beggar as a comic figure rather than an object of pity. Consequently, the Cruikshank brothers were able to represent the carefree life of the jovial crew, paradoxically at the very point when the long literary tradition was drawing to a close. The work of both Smith and the Cruikshanks testifies to the public fascination with the London beggar in these years; both offer the spectacle of low life, if safely distanced. Although these representations of the beggar's singularity and lifestyle would give way to a more moralistic response, such commemorations were still possible in the decade following the end of the Napoleonic wars.

### Conclusion

Despite the hardening of attitudes towards the beggar evident in the 1790s and beyond, visual representations of the figure showed little evidence of significant change until after the end of the Napoleonic wars. The deserving beggar continued to be represented as an object of sympathy in the paintings of the period, even appearing as one of the sacred poor on a metal token. However, at a time when individual acts of almsgiving were coming

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<sup>134</sup> George Cruikshank provided illustrations for Robert Burns' poem, *The Jolly Beggars*, in the 1820s (figure 5.31), and as late as 1832, Robert Seymour's *Beggars beginning the Day* depicted beggars preparing their props for the day's performance. (BM 1868,0808.9426)

<sup>135</sup> Gatrell 2006: 547.

under increasing scrutiny, traditional narrative scenes of benevolence declined; at the same time, abstract images of Charity increased since they offered a less problematic representation of benevolence. The idle beggar did not yet find visual form; she/he continued to be too disturbing a figure, associated with disorder and arousing both moral and physical disgust. Beggars in a group appeared as a threatening presence, only occasionally glimpsed as distant and indistinct figures in contemporary graphic satire.

Although these years saw innovative empirical studies into vagrancy, the parliamentary enquiry into mendicity in the capital was not objective but ideologically driven. If the middle class viewed poverty as a consequence of the moral failings of the poor, however, they also blamed the governing classes both for their faulty public policies and for their abdication of their moral responsibilities. As with earlier attacks on the *nouveaux riches*, the demand was for a responsible individual attitude to riches, informed by such middle-class values as charity and good stewardship, and consistent with *laissez-faire* policies. By attacking both a delinquent poor and a decadent aristocracy, the middle classes sought to establish their own moral superiority and fitness to assume roles previously the preserve of their social superiors. These attitudes informed the few satirical prints that represented the beggars' wretched state in which their suffering served rather to highlight the iniquities of the rich than to draw attention to the plight of the poor. The polite classes preferred to imagine the poor as both subservient and content; the only context in which the distress of the mendicant did find sympathetic visual representation was as an amputee war veteran, where he functioned as a signifier of patriotic service.

Paradoxically, the moral disgust felt for the beggar prompted a corresponding fascination with the figure. Normative thinking led to a wider curiosity about all forms of deviation from the norm, both physical and social. The eccentric biographies were a response to this desire for knowledge; by classifying society they both implied control and reassured the middle class of their own identity as part of the cultural norm. The illustrations of London beggars in these texts introduced a new category of beggar imagery by representing the figure as a dehumanised specimen, out of context and in profile, classified among other deviant phenomena. The fascination with the beggar reached its peak at the end of the Napoleonic wars when calls for the suppression of beggars in the capital led to the formation of the Mendicity Society. A direct consequence was the publication of Smith's *Vagabondiana*, a series of etchings celebrating the remarkable among London's beggars who would soon disappear from the streets. A more unexpected consequence of the call for reform was the unprecedented appearance in visual form of the

beggar as a comic, amoral character. As imagined by the Cruikshanks, the jovial crew invoked a life lived free from the restraints of laws and decorum; for the viewer, their transgressions were a source of entertainment rather than censure. However, as increasingly punitive measures were taken against the idle beggar, it would become impossible to view the figure as comic but only as the cause for anxiety that mendicants had always been.

### Conclusion

The prominence assumed by the image of the beggar in the years between circa 1760 and 1820 is a phenomenon that has hitherto neither been identified nor studied. As this thesis has demonstrated, this imagery had no precedent in earlier British art but emerged in response to the major socio-economic transformations of this period. The importance of the begging figure derived not from these transformations as such, however, but rather from the way that they were mediated in contemporary culture and politics. Offering as it did a vehicle that enabled the elite to come to terms with the emerging capitalist order, the image of the mendicant assumed a symbolic significance out of all proportion to their marginal status. Having served its purpose, the figure of the beggar largely vanished from British art and visual culture.

The problem of poverty was a matter of intense public concern throughout this period, exacerbated both by population increase and by the gradual erosion of a moral economy by a market model. By the middle of the century, poverty was being seen less as providential and more as a social problem. In this context, and with no native tradition on which to build, British artists of the later eighteenth century faced the challenge of developing an iconography of the begging figure acceptable to an elite audience. When represented as an idle rogue, the beggar was a morally problematic figure who did not accord with the submissive, deserving mendicant of the elite imagination. Accordingly, British painters such as John Opie and Thomas Gainsborough, and their fellow draughtsmen and printmakers, did not take up the established European visual tradition of the lazy beggar but instead drew on the alternative iconography of the figure as one of the sacred poor. In so doing, however, they recast the mendicant as a secular figure, clearly identified as one of the deserving poor. By observing aesthetic decorum, they avoided the harsh reality of destitution in order to render their images palatable for elite viewers.

More fundamentally, so this thesis has argued, the resultant beggar imagery served the ideological needs of the elite audience. In a period that saw major changes in attitudes to poverty, the image of the beggar became the focus of both the fears and the fantasies that such viewers harboured towards the poor. As Gregory Dart has observed, in Western literature, the beggar has always been 'something of an abstract and ideal figure', 'a way of



thinking about poverty that is also a way of not thinking about poverty'.<sup>1</sup> In eighteenth-century Britain, this conflicted response to the figure of the beggar, in which the problem of poverty was both acknowledged and repressed, found expression in sentimentalism. When represented in the sentimental mode, the aestheticised figure of the deserving mendicant functioned to offer reassurance to the elite viewer. By responding with pity to this visual image of poverty, the viewer could be assured of their moral status; by showing compassion, she/he acknowledged a shared humanity with the poor and excluded. Furthermore, scenes of almsgiving to the mendicant could reassure the viewer at both an individual and a national level. Where the donor was one of the *nouveaux riches*, an act of charity could serve to confirm his status as a gentleman and legitimise his new wealth. From a national perspective, charity to the deserving poor was confirmation that the British were a benevolent people.

Alongside this sympathetic response, however, this study has identified signs of a residual unease that all was not well in a society that condoned the suffering of the destitute. In the narrative scenes, depictions of almsgiving could function to contain such unease. Paintings of the child beggar, however, have been shown to prompt discomfort; few were produced, and none proved popular with the public. Containing the moral power of the beggar would also prove problematic in other genres; representations of the mendicant could not be separated from the troubling moral and social issues with which she/he was associated. It was for this reason that the figure could not easily be accommodated in the picturesque landscapes, whether rural or urban, that were purely aestheticising in their purpose. It was the inescapable moral demands that images of the mendicant made on the viewer that made the refusal of charity in Rowlandson's satirical prints an unmistakable critique of a modern commercial society. Moreover, ridicule became an inappropriate response to the beggar since the humanitarian values associated with sentimentalism made their representation as a comic figure problematic. In all these contexts, the beggar remained at some level a disturbing presence for the viewer.

Furthermore, the begging figure could elicit actual hostility when their moral claim on the elite caused resentment. In official discourse, the stereotypical mendicant was an idle and disruptive figure. The visual representation of this stereotype in the political satires that caricatured leading public figures made manifest the underlying resentment the beggar could arouse. By the end of the century, such hostility had only intensified; although a direct consequence of the fears of disorder that followed the French Revolution, the

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<sup>1</sup> Dart 2012: 155.

antagonism towards the mendicant was reinforced by the harsh moralistic attitude towards poverty that was associated with evangelicalism. By attributing the beggar's penury to their moral failings, the unease the figure had prompted could be mitigated. Although this hardening of attitudes resulted in little immediate change in beggar imagery, it nevertheless produced a fascination with the mendicant that found expression in images that now explored difference rather than a common humanity. An amoral response, one that distanced poverty from the elite viewer, manifested itself during the opening decades of the nineteenth century in both depictions of remarkable beggars in the eccentric biographies and the picturesque etchings of John Thomas Smith, and in representations of the mendicant as a comic figure.

Although the beggar imagery declined, it did not entirely disappear during the years after around 1820. The appearance of the comic beggar proved to be short-lived, but eccentric biographies were still being published in the 1860s, recycling earlier prints. Paintings of the individual mendicant featured occasionally in exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the British Institution. Moreover, titles such as *A Weary Beggar-Boy* by Robert Westall (1832), suggest that the figure was still being represented in the sentimental mode; it was considered 'a beautiful picture' by a critic writing in the *Morning Post*.<sup>2</sup> However, the decline in scenes of almsgiving, already evident at the beginning of the century, continued. Allegorical representations of charity could still be found, such as Charles West Cope's *Almsgiving* (1839), but the few scenes of paternalistic benevolence that can be documented are distanced from the here and now, giving them a nostalgic appeal.<sup>3</sup> Thus Charles Landseer chose a medieval setting for *Giving Alms* (1847), associating it with an earlier chivalry.<sup>4</sup> A surprisingly late reference to traditional rural scenes of paternalistic benevolence is *The Village Church*, painted by Henry John Boddington in 1846, which depicts a mounted horseman giving alms to two figures by the roadside as villagers leave the church (figure 6.1). These few images remain the exceptions, however; the tradition of beggar imagery that has been the subject of this thesis had effectively petered out.

The decline in images of the mendicant undoubtedly had much to do with the more discriminating attitude towards charitable giving that was advocated by evangelicalism. The emphasis was now on moral reform rather than indiscriminate relief, as evidenced in a

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<sup>2</sup> Exhibited at the Royal Academy, catalogue no. 298; *Morning Post*, 5 May 1832.

<sup>3</sup> V&A, London: FA.57[O].

<sup>4</sup> Exhibited at the Royal Academy, catalogue no. 140; reviewed in *The Athenæum*, 15 May 1847: 527.

print after a painting by William Drummond that was produced in the 1850s (figure 6.2).<sup>5</sup> It depicts a scene of domiciliary visiting where relief is combined with moral instruction. The increasingly harsh attitude to poverty was written into the statute books in the Poor Law Amendment Act, passed in 1834, which aimed to abolish outdoor relief for the able-bodied and make the only refuge for the destitute the workhouse, where conditions were to be such as to discourage entry. Control now passed from magistrates to ratepayers, marking the end, as Boyd Hilton notes, of 'the old discretionary paternalism' often shown to the poor by JPs in the past.<sup>6</sup> However, the 1830s were also the time when, as Hilton argues, social reform directed at alleviating the lot of the poor 'moved irreversibly onto the public agenda'.<sup>7</sup> Yet although the suffering of the urban poor would be vividly described by such writers as Charles Dickens, its visual representation was slow to emerge. A new mode of representing London poverty had been created by Géricault in his hard-hitting lithograph of 1821, but it would not be found in British painting for another fifty years (figure 5.25).

Significant innovation in the representation of the beggar first appeared in the new mass medium of the illustrated press. In the eighteenth century, the figure of the beggar had appeared in satirical prints to attack abuses of power; by the 1840s, however, it was the plight of the poor that had now become the subject of satire. In 1843, the magazine *Punch*, founded two years earlier, published the cartoon, *Substance and Shadow*, by John Leech (figure 6.3). It depicts an art exhibition where the viewers are not the elite but the destitute, among them familiar types of the deserving beggar such as the mother and children, and a disabled woman on a sledge on wheels. Leech is here attacking a government that offers the poor the sight of an exhibition but pays no attention to their material needs; moreover, the contrast between the impoverished spectators and the subjects on the walls serves to highlight both social inequality and the suffering of the poor. However, although the spectators include beggar types, none is shown begging.<sup>8</sup> The begging figure could no longer be assumed to prompt sympathy; the moralistic attitude of evangelicalism persisted, exemplified in a poem accompanying the illustration of a child street beggar in the *Illustrated London News* in 1849 (figure 6.6). The boy huddles against some railings; a

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<sup>5</sup> William Drummond was the son of Samuel Drummond who had exhibited the painting, *Benevolent ladies relieving a distressed family* in 1817, discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> Hilton 2006: 594.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 573.

<sup>8</sup> In nineteenth-century magazine illustrations, the beggar as a signifier of urban poverty appears to have been replaced by types such as the crossing-sweeper, or the female seamstress who was both pitiable and unproblematic (figures 6.4, 6.5).

sign on the pavement announces, 'I am Destitute', but the narrator of the verse, although pitying the boy, chooses to pass by. The hand, he claims, that can write on the placard can also 'pull the workhouse bell'; 'clamorous beggary disgusts – / theatric nakedness repels'. Although illustrations in the graphic media show clear evidence of concern for the plight of the poor, they do not feature the beggar who had become too problematic a figure to be used to stir the public conscience.

Hard-hitting images of the distress of the poor were slow to appear in high art, however. It was not until 1874 that Luke Fildes exhibited his painting, *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, at the Royal Academy, depicting a queue of the destitute, huddled together as they wait on the snow-covered pavement (figure 6.7).<sup>9</sup> As in Géricault's lithograph, the figures have a statuesque, even monumental, quality, their heads bowed in attitudes of despair. Not only is Fildes' work on a grander scale than the eighteenth-century paintings of destitute beggars, but its documentary style contrasts with the sentimentalism of the earlier images.<sup>10</sup> Linda Nochlin has argued that 'the goal of the new representational mode was not aesthetic' but rather a documentary realism that would both represent the wretched state of the destitute and make the case for social reform.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Julian Treuherz describes such paintings as *Applicants* as 'crusading pictures'; as one critic observed of Fildes' work, it prompted the response, "'What can I do to better this state of things?'"<sup>12</sup> This is very different from the eighteenth-century beggar imagery in which representations of the destitute denied the problem of the poor, suggesting rather that acts of benevolence could provide the solution.

Furthermore, the later crusading pictures no longer make use of the adult male begging figure to signify penury. Images of child beggars can still be found, such as *The Orphans*, reproduced as a print in the 1840s, but I have identified only two paintings that depict the male mendicant.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, in both the subjects are non-threatening figures since both are blind. Thomas Faed exhibited *The Poor, the Poor Man's Friend* at the Royal Academy

<sup>9</sup> The homeless could obtain temporary accommodation for the night in the casual ward of a workhouse.

<sup>10</sup> Of the eighteenth-century paintings, only Beechey's image of the Ford children and the beggar boy is on an equivalent scale, but its representation of penury is softened by the act of benevolence and by the choice of non-threatening children as subjects (figure 2.29). A large-scale nineteenth-century painting of the destitute that predates Fildes' work is *The Irish Famine*, by George Frederick Watts (c. 1849-50), depicting a starving, evicted Irish family. In common with *Applicants*, the figures have a monumental quality; however, as Valérie Morrison has argued, in the absence of any contextualisation, the mother and child are used in an allegorical form. (<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/irish-famine-13375>; Morrison 2014)

<sup>11</sup> Nochlin 2018: 160.

<sup>12</sup> Treuherz 1987: 85, 9.

<sup>13</sup> T. W. Huffam, *The Orphans*, c. 1840s. (BM 2010,7081.6403)

in 1867; the rural setting and representation of the almsgivers as a poor but industrious family make nostalgic reference to an idealised community in which social and familial bonds are strong (figure 6.8). A more traditional representation of the blind beggar and his dog and child guide is *The Blind Beggar*, an undated painting by the nineteenth-century artist, James Flewitt Mullock.<sup>14</sup> The exceptional nature of these two works is confirmation that the visual image of the beggar that had once been so ubiquitous, had now all but disappeared.

In the past decade, however, cuts to public spending have led to an increase in poverty that has once again brought the figure of the beggar to the fore. In the eyes of the law, the position of the mendicant has not changed. Begging remains illegal; the Vagrancy Act of 1824 has never been repealed, although the government has committed to reviewing the legislation.<sup>15</sup> Under the Act, a beggar can still be arrested as 'an idle and disorderly person' and a fine imposed; in 2018/9, over two thousand such charges were brought.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the Act also criminalises rough sleeping, where alternative shelter is available. Although the government has pledged to end this practice by 2027, the numbers living rough on the streets of London alone between April and June 2020 numbered over four thousand.<sup>17</sup> Thus, not only does the problem of mendicancy remain unsolved but the homeless beggar continues to be classified as a criminal.

Official discourse reinforces this image with headlines in the media portraying the mendicant as a fraud. Allegations such as 'Cheeky beggars 'earn £500 a day' on streets of Wolverhampton', or 'Beggars park up and feed the meter before a day on the streets', serve to stoke public resentment against the figure.<sup>18</sup> As in the eighteenth century, to caricature a politician as a beggar is to invite a hostile response. Peter Brookes' cartoon of Boris Johnson and Carrie Symonds begging on the steps of Number 10 Downing Street for funds to refurbish their flat does not prompt sympathy; Johnson is a dishevelled figure, swigging from a bottle of wine.<sup>19</sup> Other parallels with eighteenth-century attitudes can be found in the pressure to remove rough sleepers and beggars from city centres; under an Act of 2014

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/28125>.

<sup>15</sup> In Scotland, however, begging was decriminalised in 1982.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2018; *Third more rough sleepers on London's streets in lockdown* 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Rawlinson 2016; de Bruxelles 2017.

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 3 March 2021. <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/peter-brookes-times-cartoon-march-3-2021-6mjlxln07>> [accessed 28 July 2021]

they can be moved on if deemed to have 'a detrimental effect' on the 'quality of life' of an area.<sup>20</sup> The stereotype of the beggar as the deviant other remains.

Yet sympathy for the mendicant persists. When Nottingham City Council put up anti-begging posters in 2016, with headlines such as 'Begging: watch your money go to a fraud. Beggars aren't what they seem', they had to be taken down following complaints about the negative image they presented.<sup>21</sup> In 2007, London Councils tried to prevent soup runs providing free food in the capital but were forced to abandon the plan in the face of strong public opposition.<sup>22</sup> There is certainly greater awareness than was the case in the eighteenth century of the many reasons that lead men and women to beg. While the need to fund a drug or alcohol dependency may be one, begging can also still form part of an economy of makeshifts; modern day 'pauper professions', such as busking or selling the *Big Issue*, may not provide enough to live on. Many of those forced on to the streets are among the most vulnerable in society.

Nevertheless, begging continues to be perceived as an aggressive act. It is significant that charities for the homeless avoid the word 'beggar', referring instead to 'rough sleepers'; homelessness suggests victimhood and is more likely to win sympathy.<sup>23</sup> No change of terminology, however, can deny the fact that mendicancy continues to be a problem on the streets of Britain's towns and cities. Thus, in addressing the image of the beggar in the years between circa 1760 and 1820, this thesis has raised issues that continue to resonate today.

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson and Walker 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Sweney 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010: 1713-1714.

<sup>23</sup>

[https://static.wixstatic.com/media/e7b480\\_c86c766f65d9403389bdae269163692c~mv2.jpg/v1/fill/w\\_870,h\\_435,al\\_c,q\\_85,usm\\_0.66\\_1.00\\_0.01/simon%20on%20the%20streets](https://static.wixstatic.com/media/e7b480_c86c766f65d9403389bdae269163692c~mv2.jpg/v1/fill/w_870,h_435,al_c,q_85,usm_0.66_1.00_0.01/simon%20on%20the%20streets)

**APPENDIX**      Categories of beggar images 1760-1820

\* Images found in more than one category and counted elsewhere

<b>Categories</b>	<b>1760-1769</b>	<b>1770-1779</b>	<b>1780-1789</b>	<b>1790-1799</b>	<b>1800-1809</b>	<b>1810-1820</b>	<b>Undated</b>
<b>Figure Paintings</b>							
extant	1	4	5	-	1	-	-
listed in exhibition catalogues but now lost	4	10	8	10	13	9	-
<b>Paintings of Blind Beggars</b>							
extant	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
listed in exhibition catalogues but now lost	-	1	1	1	1	-	-
<b>Belisarius in all media</b>							
extant	-	1	1	2	2	1	1
listed in exhibition catalogues but now lost	4	2	2	2	4	1	-
<b>Paintings of Narrative Scenes of Benevolence</b>							
extant	-	1	6	7	-	1	1
listed in exhibition catalogues but now lost	-	-	-	4	2	1	-
<b>Rural landscapes</b>	1	2	2	1	-	-	1

## Appendix continued

Categories	1760-1769	1770-1779	1780-1789	1790-1799	1800-1809	1810-1820	Undated
<b>Topographical scenes</b>							
<b>a) London</b>	4	2	3	6	6	7	-
<b>b) Other</b>	3	10	2	3	6	-	8
<b>Social Satire</b>	2 + *1 also under Topo- graphical Other	3	11	9	8	8	2
<b>Political Satire</b>	4	2	11	16	4	7 + *1 also under Belisarius	1
<b>Illustrations (print)</b>							
<b>a) Books</b>	2	2	15	24	17	32	10 + *1 also under Belisarius
<b>b) Periodicals</b>	-	-	1	-	1	2	-
<b>c) Ballads</b>	-	-	-	1 + *1 also under Belisarius	3	-	1
<b>d) London Cries</b>	2	-	-	1	2	4	-



## Appendix continued

Categories	1760-1769	1770-1779	1780-1789	1790-1799	1800-1809	1810-1820	Undated
<b>Named Individual Beggars</b>							
extant	1	1	4	2	3	3	6
listed in exhibition catalogues but now lost	-	2	-	-	2 + *10 also under Book Illustrations	- + *14 (3 also under Topographical London; 11 also under Book Illustrations)	- + *6 (5 also under Book Illustrations; 1 also under Representations in other media)
<b>Representations of the Beggar in other media</b>							
extant	1	-	5	8	2	6	8
listed in exhibition catalogues but now lost	-	1	1	1	-	2	-

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